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DINA.

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DINA
OR FAMILIAR FACES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

EDINBURGH :
WILLIAM P. NIMMO.

MDCCCLXV.

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D I N A.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE hay in the paddock not far from the dining-room windows had been well tossed and spread while Mr. Grange and his friends were at breakfast, and long ere one o'clock a hot sun had drawn from it every drop of the heavy rain by which it was drenched during the thunderstorm of the night before. Mary Melville, with a light fork assisting, was now directing some field girls where to place it. She had thought—for her cousin had given her leave to do as she pleased with the hay—of making a circle of hillocks with a bare space in the centre for the luncheon, but the stiffness of this arrangement vexed her eye before it was completed, and so she ordered the hillocks to be scattered about the grass in picturesque confusion.

“One can’t flirt freely when the whole party sit face to face as at a round dinner-table,” she explained to Polly when the latter joined her to assist in the preparations.

Polly looked hot, and wondered if Mr. Eagle would return from Linbrook in time to flirt with her.

A not too densely-foliaged oak cast a pleasant shade over the greater part of the ground occupied by the hay

ricks, and on the spot where its shadow was darkest Mary directed the dishes to be placed.

When everything was in readiness the gable bell summoned the guests, and Mary and Polly awaited them at the foot of the oak.

Lockart's chair was pushed along the smooth walk leading round the lawn to the paddock by the Squire and Mr. Dryeale, and he—part of the fence having been removed—walked the rest of the way with a steadiness that surprised his friends no less than it delighted them. Arrived among the hillocks, he remained standing while the party was assembling, and Mr. Grange in vain directed his attention to one of the most commodious.

Miss Lushet, as imposing as ever, sailed across the lawn by the side of Edith Lockart, whom she appeared to be treating with marked consideration. Marian, accompanied by Mrs. Beagle, followed, while Wilmotte and his friend Calvert were not long of making their appearance.

Mary looked on critically. She had arranged the hay in six separate heaps, with the view of grouping the party in pairs, consequently, until the pairing was completed, it seemed difficult for any one to sit down. As if not personally concerned, she stood with her hands behind her, waiting. The arrival of Mr. Eagle presently made up the necessary dozen, yet still there appeared to be some obstacle in the way of a comfortable settling. Miss Lushet being in conversation with Edith, Archer felt a difficulty in claiming the latter. Lockart and Wilmotte happened to be together. Both had it in view to secure Miss Grange, but each suspecting the other's design, was too polite to make the neces-

sary advance. Eagle looked as undecided as the rest. Polly had grown suddenly bashful and did not throw herself in his way, but he saw the anxiety to be with him which her timid glance confessed, and he probably wavered between good-natured willingness to oblige her and an equally amiable unwillingness to mislead her by too frequent attentions. Mrs. Beagle, quite sure of Mr. Drycale should Mr. Eagle overlook her, had turned her back on the former with so much coolness that the little man hesitated to invite her to sit by him, and was on the point of begging Miss Lushet, whom he greatly admired, to do him that honour, when at last the Squire, who had been making some changes among the dishes, rose, exclaiming—

“ Hallo, my friends, are you all standing? Would any of you prefer chairs or cushions?”

“ By no means,” every one protested, and immediately there was a general movement to prove their appreciation of the hay-ricks as seats. Mr. Eagle offered his arm to Polly, whereupon Mrs. Beagle turned with a friendly smile to Mr. Drycale, and was handed by him to a heap. The Squire gallantly led Miss Lushet to another, which that lady took with a lingering glance at Calvert, while the latter, with a smile of relief, presented his hand to Miss Lockart and assisted to make her comfortable on a mound apart.

“ You will prefer a high heap; here is one,” said Marian to Sir Angus.

Lockart, immediately remembering that with both hands engaged by his sticks, he could not assist in helping the ladies to lunch, prudently took his place on the heap indicated,—feeling at once mortified and pleased by Miss Grange’s attention.

Wilmotte bit his lip, in spite of his previous resolution to give up Marian with a good grace, and turned away, feeling himself *de trop*; but at that moment a soft hand touched his sleeve, and Mary Melville, with real pity and affected mortification, said,—

“I am left!”

“Ah, dear Mary!” exclaimed the Doctor, relieved and thankful.

“Come and we’ll have a cosy chat all by our little selves,” said she, as if meaning, “You’ve me at least to stand by you and comfort you!”

He led her to the remaining rick, and then joined the gentlemen and Marian, who were busy filling plates for their partners.

“Pray allow me to do that for you, Miss Grange,” he said, forgetting Mary, when he saw Marian taking a gentleman’s office on account of Lockart’s lameness.

“You are very kind,” she replied, “but I prefer to help Sir Angus myself.”

“I shall at least supply *you*, Miss Marian,” said the Doctor, following her with a plate of cold chicken.

Lockart received his portion with his customary grace, but not without a tinge of crimson in his usually pallid cheeks; and seeing Wilmotte’s object, he begged Miss Grange to be seated. She at once reclined, rather on the opposite side of the mound, and accepted what the Doctor had brought with quietly spoken thanks.

Wilmotte, to whom her least word was music, bowed, with a stifling sensation in his breast, and then returning to the dishes, became aware that Mary’s bright glance was following his motions.

“My poor Ellis!” remarked that unconstrained little damsel, as the Doctor at last approached with a slice of

fowl for her, and a couple of biscuits for himself, "I fear you've let the tide go by that would have led you on to fortune! I am sorry that I did not long ago give Marian a hint of what you were looking forward to. Had I helped her, poor blind little dreamer, to guess it, she might have been ready to jump at you ere this. At least, if not to jump at you, as I would at a man I liked, to take you gladly when you offered yourself;--there's a difference, perhaps. I hope you'll pardon my neglect. Was it, after all, any business of mine to meddle in the affair? I will be a Job's comforter enough to say, Doctor, that it's through your own fault and 'dourness' that you are brought to this sad pass."

Mary's speech gave Wilmotte time to recover his equanimity, and, firmly recalling his determination to meet his, as it now seemed to him, inevitable disappointment with calmness, he smiled upon his pretty reprobate as he took his seat beside her on the hay,

"Ha, so you can smile still!" she continued. "How often has she seen you smile? What have you ever done to win her; to make her think of you as anything but a grave old doctor and friend of her father's, eh? You may well blush—a youthful trick you've not outgrown, though your hair's getting grey, Sir Lover."

He blushed when reminded of his stupid procrastination, but when Mary thus recklessly touched on his greyness, a sadness fell upon his lips, and he glanced round at the jetty hair of Angus Lockart, who was perhaps a year his senior.

"Don't be vexed," added Mary, pressing his hand. "I only meant that the streaks of white would help to make Mar think of you as rather her father's friend than her own, when your manner to her had nothing in

it to suggest the contrary. Grey hair doesn't make you older than you are really, and it would have made no difference in your fortune, had you shown proper pluck, and made love to the bonny lass!"

Mary's glib tongue was sweetly tuned, and though Ellis felt himself rather absurdly situated when thus sagely admonished by a little girl, he could not be annoyed. Again he smiled kindly on her—with so much kind feeling, indeed, that there was moisture in his eye.

"Dear old glummy!" she exclaimed, by way of answer to his smile, "what a nice look you have when you look that way!"

A green and white small-checked dress she wore showed its colours agreeably beside the fresh young grass on to which it flowed, for its green was from a vegetable dye. Prettily her hair contrasted with it, and bright beside it looked the exquisitely delicate sheen of her neck and face, of which the softly blended pink and white was matched, but not outshone by the beautiful large rose which she had gathered in the widow's garden, and now wore stuck in the front of her dress, just under her chin. She had thrown aside her hat, and ringlets danced about the back of her neck whenever she made her emphatic or jocular speeches with her usual confirmatory nods or shakes. Gleams of sunshine stealing through the oak foliage touched her head here and there, making it like some golden image burnished on its mouldings. A sun-ray also pierced one of her eyes for a moment, and made it look like a ball of pale green glass. Then her head turned, and, in the shade, both eyes appeared of a soft olive, a grassy, a yellow, or even a greyish hue as they softened, sparkled, flashed,

or drooped with the varying humours of their restless owner.

“Dear old glummy” not only smiled on her with friendly interest, but, looking at her changing countenance, radiant with playfulness at one moment, and sweetly sympathetic the next, his whole face lightened up like a rocky hill-top catching the dawn. And while his iron-featured face grew luminous with pleasure, a corresponding glow warmed his lately chilled heart and made his blood circulate revivingly.

Mary joyfully noticed his increasing cheerfulness, and set herself by gay banter, and all the pleasant wiles she knew of, to make him gladsome wholly. Nor, even there, within a few feet of Marian and Sir Angus, was she unsuccessful.

Wilmette considered himself a paragon of constancy, and yet he basked in the sportive light of Mary’s eyes with a feeling of blissfulness, which he could scarcely remember to have experienced before, even at moments when a more than ordinarily lingering glance from Marian, or an unwonted blush on Marian’s cheek had given rise in his breast to a passing hope.

And so, in pure charity and friendliness, the sunny little girl chatted and laughed, and rolled her curls round the Doctor’s wrist, and unintentionally, and even unwittingly stole into the good man’s heart.

He, to be sure, did not suspect what was happening, for amid his recent resolves to resign once for all his pretensions to Marian’s hand, it had not occurred to him that thereby a vacancy would at once be made in his bosom, which it might be well that some new image should be found to fill; and never had it struck him that playful Mary Melville, much as he loved her

was likely to furnish such an image at any time. But it is not without deep-rooting effects that a sad man is beguiled out of his sadness by the tender charity of a sympathizing woman, all compact of lovingness and wit.

Angus Lockart was not unobservant of the Doctor's rising spirits.

"Those two seem to be on excellent terms," he remarked to Miss Grange.

"My cousin is very fond of him—much more so than she is aware of," answered Marian, with her soft eyes looking out straight from their dark fringe at Mary.

"Than she is aware of!"

"Yes," said Marian, looking down, "I fancy it never occurred to her that there was any chance of him thinking of her, and so she has indulged her affection for him without suspecting its nature."

Marian spoke in her usual tone, and yet it might be doubted if she viewed the subject in a merely critical and dispassionate spirit. Observing Lockart's dark eyes studying her expression curiously, she presently looked a little confused, and showed some awkwardness in the dislocation of her chicken wing.

"And why, pray, is it probable that she, a girl so pretty and self-satisfied, has never thought that my good friend might 'think of her'?" asked Lockart, bent upon getting a little useful information.

Marian hesitated, and then, apparently constraining herself to answer calmly, said,—

"Because she has, I believe, long thought Dr. Wilmotte—"

She paused.

"Attached to some other?" suggested Sir Angus.

"Yes," replied Marian steadily.

"And do you think her guess a happy one?"

"I have lately suspected that she is not mistaken, but I know nothing."

Her voice was firm, but she spoke with evident difficulty, and as if in pursuance of some strong resolve to, it might be, set the facts of the case so far as they concerned herself beyond dispute once for all.

Lockart saw that the subject interested her deeply; personally, perhaps, and not as a bit of gossip merely, but he felt very uncertain about her object in forcing herself to speak of Wilmotte's feelings. If she were about to satisfy him that she did not care for the Doctor, and was indisposed to have himself turn from her, under a mistaken idea that the Doctor's addresses were acceptable, that was an agreeable fact, much or little as he might be really disposed to profit by it; but would it not betray, he asked himself, a want of maidenly delicacy thus deliberately to clear the way for his suit? He gazed at her youthful face with its girlish features and fresh red-lipped mouth, and felt touched by its tender beauty, then he looked critically at her grave eyes, dark under the double shade of the oak foliage and the broad rim of her garden hat, and felt assured of at least her straightforwardness.

At a loss what to say next, it was only after an interval, during which he made a feint of eating, that he remarked,—

"Wilmotte is a man for whom I have formed a great regard. Your father also likes him."

Marian thought a little, and then slowly and carefully replied,—

"Dr. Wilmotte is one of our oldest friends. I don't

remember his first visit to Ashcroft. His kindness has been unremitting, and my sister and I have loved him dearly ever since we were children."

"Very good indeed," thought Angus; "plain enough, and yet surely expressed with all the delicacy I could wish. She is aware of, but does not return the Doctor's passion, and, in the circumstances, motherless as she is, how can I blame her for taking means to let the truth be known? I might fairly have thought that during such a long intimacy some tacit agreement had been come to between her and Wilmotte, and she is right in disabusing me of such a suspicion. Should her wish that I in particular shall not be misled by what I may have heard or seen of his attentions, prejudice me against her?"

So many young lady acquaintances of Miss Lockart's had looked engaging in the bereaved baronet's presence during the past year, that anything indicative of a fore-gone disposition to be courted by him put him at once on his guard. Hitherto, not even on the night of the thunderstorm, had he observed such a disposition in Miss Grange, and this had softened him towards her. The plainness with which she now, to all appearance, let him know that he had nothing to fear from Ellis Wilmotte's rivalry, rather disappointed him then, and it required all her look of genuineness and all her beauty to reconcile him to what he considered an advance on her part.

But only for a minute was he thus hard to please. Quickly he yielded to the fascination of her air, and felt glad at heart that the girl whom his sister had praised to him often and warmly was not improbably likely to be within his reach should he continue to re-

gard her with interest. And, to do Angus justice, the pleasure his friend and physician now seemed to feel in chatting with Mary Melville was not calculated to remind him compassionately that Wilmotte would meet with a very severe disappointment should he see Miss Grange claimed by another. Without compunction, then, he could indulge a certain disposition he felt to reciprocate the feeling with which his vanity or intelligence taught him that his partner was not unwilling to regard him.

"Let me offer you some jelly," said Marian, carrying off Lockart's plate and her own, just as he was on the point of making a propitiatory speech to her.

"I am sorry to give you the trouble. You will bring some for yourself also," he answered hesitatingly, for only on that condition was he disposed to accept the jelly.

"Oh yes," she said frankly. "I don't in the least mean to desert you."

"She's a puzzle," thought he; "this perfect frankness, one might fancy, indicates as little tender interest in me as that speech about Wilmotte showed love of him, or am I to understand that it is her way to speak the truth in all simplicity even when her heart is touched? In that case the candid expression of much affection for the Doctor would not prove her to be on merely friendly terms with him. Hum! I must be on my guard. One never knows where to have people who express themselves unaffectedly; and, yet, by-the-by, I who have a most sincere sister ought not to find it embarrassing to talk to an honest woman!"

Marian returned with two plates of jelly, and again seated herself on the hay heap.

Lockart at the moment was looking at Edith.

"She seems very happy," said Marian, following his glance.

Angus gazed at herself inquiringly, but Marian turned her attention to the jelly, probably feeling afraid to enlighten him regarding the evident enough flirtation going on between his sister and Captain Calvert.

"I like what I have seen and heard of that young man," he remarked calmly, after a second or two, and without a notion that the "young man" was fully two years older than himself.

"Do you, Sir Angus?" cried Marian with sudden animation, "he is the best and bravest and kindest hearted—"

Lockart's wondering eyes looked into hers with so much admiring interest that she paused and coloured a little.

"Pardon me so rude a stare, if such you thought it," he said, lightly laying his white hand on the back of Marian's. "You were going to plead with me for the 'bravest and kindest,' and I am sorry I inadvertently stopped your generous panegyric. What were you about to say?"

"You are mocking me, Sir Angus. Besides, I may safely leave you to guess what I was going to say further from the beginning of my speech. I see, too, that you deprecate being taken for a cross-grained guardian!"

"I do," replied Angus with a gratified smile; "merely because I have Edith's happiness at heart, I should not think of setting up my judgment too decidedly against her preference in any case. So you think she looks favourably on that lad, who, to be sure, is very attentive to her just now?"

Marian saw that in this instance at least Edith was likely to be left to please herself, so she thought it enough to say—

“ My cousins the Melvilles have known him very intimately since his return to Edinburgh. He was severely wounded in India several years ago. We have all the greatest regard for him.”

The pleasure she experienced in saying a timely word for her friend’s suitor made her quite animated, and Lockart, watching her with interest, felt again satisfied of her naturalness and truthfulness.

“ I fancied during breakfast that your tropical beauty, Miss Lushet, seemed to have a sort of right to Captain Calvert. Are they related ?” he said.

Marian glanced uneasily at Bracy, who, indicating the house, evidently was at the moment graciously praising Mr. Grange for the architectural skill he had evinced in rebuilding it, and then she looked up at Lockart to see if he had spoken in jest.

“ No,” she replied, “ but they are great friends. Edith knows all about it !”

“ Oh, does she ? Ha, ha ; and is willing to stake her fortune on her own superior charms, eh ? The lucky fellow, to have such a choice !”

Marian looked indignant.

“ He is very well,” she said, “ but—”

“ Being only the best, and bravest, and kindest of men,” put in Sir Angus, “ neither is likely to care so very much for him ; eh, Miss Grange ?”

Marian, unable to deny her own words, seemed abashed, and Lockart kindly refrained from pursuing his advantage.

"Yes, I like this little Marian very much indeed," thought he. "She's a generous little soul, and very lovely."

He turned to speak again, but a maid-servant was addressing Miss Grange, and presently the latter rose, apologizing, and went off to the house, while the maid took her plate and Lockart's.

Thus left, he naturally turned his attention to his sister's proceedings, and marked, half with pleasure and half with grudging, that she seemed really happy in listening to Archer, who, mindful of his compact with her, perhaps was talking to her with no small display of empressement. Then he glanced at Bracy. She also was rather more animated than usual, and from the frequency with which she looked round at Archer and Edith, he guessed that her animation was due to the effort she was making to do two things at once—converse with the Squire, and watch Calvert.

But nearly an hour had passed since the lunch began, and Marian had scarcely returned, when a groom announced that the Beechworth carriage and Miss Melville's basket were ready.

"Don't forget grandmamma's dance at the Dingle to-morrow, any of you," cried Mary Melville, jumping up with her usual vivacity.

"I am so glad Edith thinks you will come to it," she added, addressing Lockart, with both hands outstretched to help him to rise. "Grandmamma particularly desired her love to you, Sir Angus, and said you would surely not disappoint her, especially after coming to-day to Ashcroft to breakfast; that sort of thing would be too provocative of jealousy!"

Lockart, smiling, gave her one hand, while with the other he raised himself.

"I hope to have the gratification of seeing Mrs. Melville," he said, laying a finger gently on Mary's head —a familiarity which her youth and piquant frankness excused.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"MALCOM says that the Bluestar was never known to arrive before seven o'clock, and that often and often it does not come in sight until near eight," said Lucy Pentonville, addressing her sister, as they sat on the sea-shore common, about half a mile from Oden church.

The mail-cart, with unwonted punctuality, had dropped the cottage letter-bag at its destination precisely at four o'clock, and a brief note, despatched by Edith immediately after Master Ebon set out on his journey to Glasgow, had at length satisfied the lonely ladies that their boy might confidently be expected to arrive this Friday evening by the Bluestar coach. Malcom having been strictly enjoined to be at the village inn with the phaeton by not later than half-past six, Miss Pentonville and Dina set out on foot along the sands, where they proposed to linger until the appearance of the flag, usually hoisted above the Oden Arms as soon as the stage-coach could be distinguished in a cleft of the neighbouring hills.

Dina had not been able to rest this afternoon until quite tired. Before breakfast, she, as we have seen, carefully inspected Ebon's bedroom, and put his pony through its paces; and after breakfast she critically

went over every article of the wardrobe she had prepared for him.

The poor soul had with her own hands made for her boy not only a change of every sort of underclothing, but a complete suit of rich blue velvet, consisting of a tunic, slashed with orange silk and trimmed with gold lace, and a pair of knickerbocker shorts to match. The very stockings of orange silk in which it was proposed to encase the youngster's legs were knit by her indefatigable fingers; and such was her anxiety to clothe him entirely with her own handiwork that she looked almost with jealousy at a pair of little shoes of which she had been obliged to intrust the making to the village cobbler—that craftsman's art being one which she had tried in vain to learn, though she had dissected a pair of her own boots in pursuit of the secret.

Having seen that every button was in its right place, and every button-hole made to correspond, this zealous mother then went off to the kitchen and amazed the cook by peeping into all the dishes and vessels which could possibly come to be used in the preparation of any of Ebon's meals. In short, she was on her feet or actively occupied during the greater part of the day, and she had not walked very long on the shore near Oden before her watchful sister detected an indecision in her step which spoke of fatigue.

"Let us sit in this nook till they hoist the flag or you'll not be fit to hold your head up when Ebon arrives," Lucy had said, and then having got Dina to seat herself on the sand, she enforced patience by Malcom's evidence regarding the railway-like regularity with which the Bluestar avoided coming in before its time.

"It is only a quarter past six now," said Dina, looking at her watch with a weary air.

"Be thankful, darling, that you've nearly an hour for rest," replied her sister. "You have been in a fever all day about our pet's arrival, and yet you know how important it is that you should be strong while he is with us. The least slip may betray you. Remember that his nurse, Robina, is said to be very quick and intelligent though she cannot write."

"Oh, how fortunate it is, Lucy, that she cannot write!"

"It is, indeed, since that secures us for the three weeks at least, even should she guess who you are."

"Still, you know, Lucy dear, if this sharp Robina were to fancy anything, she might find some one in the village to write for her to Edith, and how awful it would be if Angus were to send suddenly to have me carried back to House of Dawn, or worse, to Beechworth straight. Oh, what should I do if I found that he distrusted me as much as ever, and if he again tore away my darling; perhaps, too, telling the child what a wretched mother he had, and so teaching him to hate me? Oh, Lucy, love, what should I do? I might go raving mad after all."

"Tootie, tootie, dearest Di, how you imagine things, and look as distressed as if they were actually occurring! I won't have such silly ways: not I indeed. Do you think that all these two years you've had a sister for nothing? No, no, my pet; were Angus ever so infatuated he could not ill-use you again while I stood by you."

"Yes, I am silly; that is, I was. I know that with you to speak for me I need fear nothing."

"Nothing that he can do, my poor one; and, trust me, we shall very soon satisfy him of his folly in having doubted you at any time. We have already waited too long in the hope of tracing Annette. I mean to write again to Dresden, where some light may be thrown on the mystery by this time, and I am in great hopes that before Ebon has to go back some means may be found of discomfiting Vidocq and bringing Angus to reason."

"Poor Angus, you forget what he has suffered. If he has been unjust to me, every injury must have stabbed his own heart even more sorely than mine; and I never thought him exactly unreasonable."

"Oh dear, no! he had the best reason for everything he did. Vidocq swore to everything. You would not have had him distrust Vidocq, so long his servant, certainly not."

"Lucy! how can you be so—"

"Dear, dear! remember my temper, and forgive me, my wronged one."

"Not wronged, Lucy. I won't have it said. Some things looked very suspicious. Other people thought Angus quite in the right, and that he was even far too forbearing in keeping me beside him, until that silly story, that I wanted to drown my little boy, drove him to send me away. He was more patient and indulgent than any other husband would have been."

"Yet doubted your word, and then thought my darling mad because she was beside herself with grief he had caused!"

"Cruel Lucy, cruel!"

"Ah, my tongue! I could bite it out. I never will speak so again. But you know, Di, that while I hit him hard now and then, I have steadily maintained

that Angus has thought better of you by this time, and in his heart loves you. Edith has made me feel that that is so a hundred times."

" Yet how can he love me while believing the story ? He may pardon, but can he—"

" We have no proof that he believes it still. Edith evidently never heard of it ; and I am confident that little Ebon has never been taught to think ill of his mother."

" Or to understand that he ever had a mother at all, Lucy ?"

" Well, we're not sure of that. Edith at least must have told him of her, especially if she knew nothing of the scandal against her. That his mother was once happy, and that she was drowned; so much, I think, Edith must have told him, young as he is."

" Perhaps ; but if you are right in believing that he must have quite forgotten me, he will not know what sort of thing a mother is. He'll hardly associate anything with the name. If I were to tell him that I am his mother, maybe he wouldn't think twice about it."

" Di, Di, how ingeniously you torment yourself ! Certainly he'll know soon what it is to have a mother, by whatever name he may address her."

Dina brightened at this assurance and kissed her sister, who sat near her on the warm sand. They had selected a retired corner among the hillocks of the waste, a corner where they were screened by large furze bushes, but from which they could see both the flag-staff of the village inn and the road on the hillside, down which the stage coach must wind its way. The sun, now in the west, shone pleasantly upon them from a sparsely-clouded sky, and the broad hats they wore

shaded both face and shoulders from its too familiar rays.

Dina was not idling while she talked. Her fingers were very busy completing the embroidery with gold thread of the blue velvet cap she intended Master Ebon to wear with the blue tunic and knickerbockers. Very exquisite was the pattern, and, of course, of her own devising. She disliked even to be instructed as to the way in which the braid should be put on, and certainly if a dress of her own contrivance and making would make Ebon hers he was likely to be so. Yet, with all this doating greediness, the poor girl thought she had so schooled her heart into good behaviour that she would not be jealous of her sister being known to the boy by an endearing title while she herself passed for a friend of his aunt's at most!

"Darling," said Miss Pentonville, "remember when the coach comes in that you are Mrs. Penton, my companion, and that I must kiss Ebon first."

Dina had not thought of this. She had again and again mentally rehearsed her difficult part, honestly trying to learn it; but this had been forgotten, and a hundred times she had in her dreams passionately devoured the youngster the very moment the guard lifted him from the coach door. She looked up piteously in her sister's face for a moment, and then burst into tears, falling as she did so upon the kind bosom that had sheltered her so long.

"Poor child, won't you have him all to yourself the moment we get into the phaeton, and Robina is up outside beside Malcom? Dearest, you know that if you were to eat the little fellow up at once, as if you had the better right to make a meal of him, Robina would

be scandalized and astonished, and might never rest till she got her wonder expressed to Edith one way or another.

Dina dried her cheeks meekly, and pressed her sister's hand to her lips to show her contrition.

"I'm so selfish," she sighed ; "but I will be very good, and I may have him to myself in the phaeton, you said ?"

"Yes, dear, only perhaps you needn't quite finish him even there. Robina will expect him to be handed over without deduction when we reach home. You know Robina is in great authority ; and I doubt if Angus will expect her to obey us. Then you must not set the boy either a-wondering, because, you see, he'll report everything to his nurse. It is hard on you to be restrained so, but think what even a distant look at him would be, after these years of separation, and you will surely feel abundantly satisfied."

"It is all very well for you to talk so, sister," said Lady Lockart, patting Lucy's cheek and smiling.

"Ah, you are brightening again, love. That's right ; you've every reason to be happy. How gay you were in the morning ! and remember, dear, it was not by a tearful and anxious face that you proposed to attract the boy."

The sweet lady dried her cheeks more diligently when thus reminded of her morning thoughts, and it did not occur to her that Lucy had only guessed them. She looked at her watch again ; but there was still a good while to wait. The cap was now quite finished, and she wrapped it carefully in her handkerchief. The lad would probably fill it with sand next day, but the first time, at least, it would be put on his head unsoiled and bright in its blue and gold.

"I hope we shall contrive to keep on good terms with Robina," remarked Lucy after an interval, as she rolled up a piece of lace on which she had been working, and set herself in a more convenient attitude for watching the hillside and the flag-staff.

"What is it Edith says about her?" asked Dina.

Miss Pentonville took a letter from her reticule and glanced over it.

"Robina," she replied, "is to be answerable for everything that may happen to Ebon, and except when he is with me, she is never to lose sight of him."

"Isn't that hard?"

"By no means, Di. How should Angus suppose that my 'lady companion' is likely to take the most interest in the lad's welfare? You see how anxious he is about his boy—your boy! Ah, Dina, depend upon it he no longer thinks hardly of you. There was an expression in one of Edith's letters lately which seemed to me to show that it was not a little as a relic of his lost one that he prized his son."

"Of his lost one, as she was before her supposed fall, Lucy. May not that be his feeling? and so may not his tenderness to the boy be no proof at all that he has learned to think better of me?"

"I cannot dispute that; and yet over and over again I have felt persuaded in reading Edith's letters that little things she mentioned indicated that Angus was always brooding over the past with gnawing remorse. Indeed, I do feel more and more, Di, that we may safely ask Edy to touch upon the subject in talking to him. I think, too, that in a fortnight at farthest I shall venture to write directly to himself, and boldly assure him of my belief that his wife never did him a wrong, as

I used to do before you fled to me. I will do so even should I not have a vestige of evidence to offer against Vidocq. We shall then know how his feelings run. My belief is that instead of scoffing at me as formerly, he will be eager to take my view, and will put Vidocq to tests which the rascal will be ill able to bear. Yes, dear, after all the thoughts he must have had, after bitter repentance for at least his hastiness, he will at last so long to have your memory cleared, that, even in the face of what he may still regard as good evidence, his faith in you will revive so much that it will be safe to tell him everything without a doubt that, overjoyed, he will credit every word we say. You will go to him as from the grave, and Vidocq, conscience-stricken, will confess or fly.

Dina clung very close to her sister, shuddering but saying nothing. She had grown used to relying on her sister, whose greater strength of character had certainly saved Dina from despair and enabled her to bear up against her heavy trials. Believing that all the evidence against her remained as strong as ever, Dina could not unaided have thus thought of facing Sir Angus, or even of letting it be known that she had survived her rash leap into the Tay; but Lucy was to her as a tower of strength, and with Lucy's arms to shield her, much might be done which could not in other circumstances have been dreamed of. She wept and hoped, and in her sister's sounder judgment she would put her trust.

“Everything shall be done as you will it,” she said.

Presently she sat up again and looked with her moist eyes at the hill and the flag-staff and then at her watch.

"Are we not too far off? Shouldn't we be a little nearer the village when the coach comes in sight?" she asked.

"No, Di; it takes fully twenty minutes to come down the winding road, for we've no Swiss drivers here; and it is not ten minutes' walk to the inn. You would fret, and make the people stare were you to arrive too soon and loiter in the street."

"But we might sit in the carriage or the inn."

"They've no private room in the inn, dear, and we might have to sit an hour in the phaeton, the coach is so often late, as Malcom says."

Dina submitted.

"We can't hurry it, that's certain, I only hope that nothing has happened to it."

"Pooh, pooh! Nothing ever did happen to the Blue-star. Twice a week these two years it has defied all weathers. I wonder, by-the-bye, how Angus got on at the breakfast party."

"What party, Lucy?"

"There! you could think of nothing but the boy. Edith talks of going with her brother to Ashcroft to breakfast to-morrow, that means this morning; and she is hopeful that Angus will accompany her also to an afternoon party at Dingleheath on Saturday, to-morrow, that is."

"Oh, I wonder what sort of people he'll meet! How well he must be! Can he walk now?"

"Edy doesn't say so, and it was only the other day that she described his wheel-chair. But he must be much stronger and in better spirits than hitherto. You may see from that how it won't do to delay our plans any longer. He might—"

“ What, Lucy ? ”

“ Why, I think that the sooner I break the ice the better it may be for all parties.”

“ But what were you going to say, dear ? What might he do ? — See some one who might make him glad to think no more of his poor Di ? ”

“ As if any one could match my beautiful sister ! But thinking of her as dead and gone two years ago, the poor fellow, being but thirty, barely middle-aged, you know, would not do wrong in looking about him. Nay, do not let that distress you, love ; I say it but the more to win your consent to stronger measures : to writing to him even without evidence from Germany, or Annette’s testimony. As for a rival, believe me that there isn’t a creature in all this neighbourhood who doesn’t worship your very footprints. You are as endearing and lovely as ever you were ; more so even than on your marriage-day : and the Melville and Grange girls must be marvels indeed, if they eclipse you. No, when you rise from the dead, it will be on no grave-wasted spectre that Lockart’s wondering eyes will rest.”

Poor Dina looked blushingly and tenderly at her enthusiastic sister, and half unconsciously smoothed her hair, and re-tied the ribbons of her sun-hat.

“ Yes,” continued Lucy, watching her fingers, “ where will he ever again, except on his fond wife, see amber hair like that ? not at the Dingle or Ashcroft, I’ll be bound.—There’s the coach ! ”

Her quick eye had discerned the leaders ere the coach itself appeared on the edge of the hill, and when Dina jumped up, as she did at once, it was just coming

into sight. Di would have gone off to the village at a run, but calmer Lucy held her back, and by gentle but firm constraint made her walk at a pace which would bring them to the village just a little before the Blue-star would dash into it with bugle blowing.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE front window of Oden Cottage drawing-room was wide open, and the evening sun from his position but a little way above the mountains of the sea-girt isles to the north-west shone in slantingly. The sea was a plain of molten gold; the islands purple shadows of fantastic shapes. The level clouds above the mountain crests blazed along their edges in crimson and orange, which looked the hotter for the greenish yellow of the sky beyond.

Ebon Lockart, to whom a sunset over the sea was unfamiliar, sat at a table facing the window, and the sweetness of the true heather honey with which his bread was spread did not suffice to keep his attention on his meal. His large dark eyes wandered from the table and gazed solemnly at the purple hills, and at the rippled waters of the bay, the latter so strangely alive, so wonderful to him in their changing hues.

He seemed to forget the ladies in whose company he was, and who looked not at the sun but at him, while, half unconsciously, they sipped their tea.

“Mrs. Penton” had “behaved herself” on the arrival of the Bluestar to the admiration of her sister. With her hands clasped tightly round the handkerchief which

enclosed the embroidered cap, she stood a little apart while Lucy received the boy in her arms, and she contented herself with gazing intently at him, with open and wonder-stricken eyes, until Lucy turned and led the little fellow to her without a word. Hesitatingly she then took his two hands in hers, and, trembling very much, looked timidly at him as if uncertain what to do. He had so changed! From a chubby infant he had grown into a pale, thin boy, tall for his age, and so like his father that he looked like a miniature of him. Dina felt bewildered. This was not the child of her dreams, much as she had expected Ebon to resemble his father. The lad gazed at her with perfect gravity and in silence, and then, as if satisfied with her air, quietly put up his face to be kissed. She melted instantly, and, stooping, clasped him in a long embrace, while on his little mouth she pressed a kiss so close and fervent that the boy looked at her inquiringly, when at length she reluctantly released him. Just one kiss. Lucy had made a warning movement as she stood between the lad and his nurse, and Dina bravely constrained herself. Taking her nephew by the hand, Lucy led him to the phaeton. She was going to help him to mount into it, but the nurse, anticipating her, lifted him and set him at once in the carriage, and then held open the door for the ladies—Malcom having to mind the spirited ponies, while his stable boy, who played footman on occasion, was busy getting the luggage from the stage coach.

Ebon's pale cheeks crimsoned, and he glanced round at his nurse with flashing eyes, while before the ladies he looked abashed. He was evidently mortified at having been treated like a child in their presence. "Mrs. Penton" stepped in next, and motioned to Ebon

to take the back seat, but the blushing youth bowed, and indicated that the back seat was for the ladies. Dina, much impressed by his dignity, took the seat she had offered him. Lucy seated herself beside her, expecting the nurse Robina then to close the door. But Robina was accustomed to ride in the Beechworth carriage when Edith took her nephew out drives without Sir Angus, and she now took her seat beside the boy as a matter of course.

“Mrs. Penton” felt aggrieved, but concealed her feelings. She was the better enabled to do so by the gravity of Master Ebon, who, with his eyes fixed upon her, and already forgetful of the wound his dignity had suffered, seemed again to speculate upon her probable reason for kissing him so passionately. He awed her, and, after all, she felt rather glad that the nurse’s presence postponed that tender, devouring scene of which she had so often dreamt.

Not a word had the lad spoken—scarcely, indeed, had one been addressed to him. His mother was dumb. Had she attempted to speak, she would have sobbed. Lucy, usually cool enough, found it easiest to question Robina about the journey.

Ebon had so much the air of a little man, and looked so serious, and so deliberately fixed his father’s mournful eyes upon those who addressed him, that strangers often knew not what to say to him—whether to speak as to a child, playfully, or as to a grave man, gravely.

Dina’s eyes fell more than once before his, and she blushed and grew pale, and could hardly overcome the feeling that the eyes of her husband himself were profoundly searching her heart. In a little she felt unable to bear them any longer, and taking his hands, she

drew him towards her. He yielded readily, as if beginning to like her, and stood quietly between his mother and aunt, looking at each alternately, but chiefly at his mother, whose hungering gaze seemed to fascinate him. Then slowly and timorously Dina put an arm round him, and silently pressed' him to her heart, whilst Robina, a lively girl, chatted frankly to Miss Pentonville.

Ten minutes brought the phaeton to the cottage door. Master Ebon drew himself up the moment it stopped, and, stiffening his neck, looked round warily at his nurse. She wasn't to take liberties with him again ; he knew how to behave like a gentleman. The girl quite understood his expression, and laughed, though rather as if half afraid to do so. When the groom threw open the carriage door, Ebon, who had prepared himself, leaped out lightly, and turning immediately, radiant at his success, held up his little hand to "Mrs. Penton," as if he would fain assist her to descend. The poor lady had sufficient self-command to humour him, and, with a tear springing in her eye, she gave him her hand, smiling. Miss Pentonville, following her sister's example, also allowed him to fancy that he handed her down, and then came Robina, to whom the youngster showed the same politeness. But this was more than Robina, with her ready sense of humour, could stand, and the moment she was down, she threw her arms round him, and embraced and kissed him in a way that said plainly,— "Oh, you comical little chap, what a darling you are!"

Dina loved the nurse from that moment, and always reproached herself when jealous of her ; but Master Ebon was deeply hurt, and could hardly look up at his relatives. That evening he would indeed hardly speak to Robina again, until, on going to bed, he found it quite

impossible to keep any longer to himself the wonder and delight with which he had seen the sun set over the sea and the purple isles.

Edith had often written about the lad's singularly precocious sense of the beautiful. His great delight was to sit on his father's knee and watch the changing sky of an evening from the Beechworth parlour; but at sunset he had never been so near the sea as Oden Cottage was, nor had any wide water ever lain directly between him and the horizon-kissing sun. Hence the wonder with which he watched from the cottage window the yellow flashes of the waves and ripples which a moderate south breeze kept alive upon this island-spotted fringe of the great Atlantic.

Robina washed and brushed him in the pretty room which the two were to share—Miss Pentonville having taken them to it, while her "companion" went to make tea in the drawing-room. When Lucy returned to the ground-floor, she reported to her sister, with a smile, that Master Ebon was behaving with great *hauteur* to his nurse—almost altogether ignoring her presence, in fact. To his aunt, on the other hand, he had condescended to answer "Yes," and "No, Aunt," with much sweetness of manner. The youth was evidently easily offended, and a little resentful in his disposition. They would have to deal carefully with him until they understood his character. Miss Lucy thought this a good joke, and laughed, while she sliced a loaf of home-made bread, and placed a clear honeycomb in a crystal dish; but her account of the lad's bearing quite alarmed his mother, and filled her mind with the direst apprehensions. How was she in her, at any rate, most difficult position to avoid the risk of offending this young fel-

low's pride? Even the single motherly kiss she had given him had apparently surprised him--and, oh, so much depended on her success in winning his love! on that depended all her blissful anticipations of giving her child a fonder mother than child had ever had before! Such were her thoughts when by-and-by Robina came down with her charge and ushered him into the room. Patience, patience, she must be patient, and content to draw him to her slowly; thus Dina schooled herself when she heard the approaching steps. She was adjusting the "cosy" on the teapot when the door opened, and she took particular pains to appear intent upon making it fit close down to the tray while the nurse and child walked in. The former stayed but a moment, and then retired to the kitchen, where she presently remarked to the cook that Mrs. Penton seemed a nice quiet lady, but indifferent about children--indeed, she hadn't been at the pains to speak a word to Master Ebon since his arrival.

Ebon came into the room frankly, and with perfect ease took the seat his aunt had placed for him. Then the good things were set before him, and he enjoyed them with childlike relish until, his appetite quite satisfied, the landscape visible through the open window attracted his attention, and, forgetful of his honeyed bread, he sat quietly gazing at the sun with his strangely serious eyes in the manner I have described.

Except a few questions about his tastes, addressed to the boy by his aunt, and answered by him in a polite, but brief and decided way, not a word had been spoken during the meal. Dina, who sat as still as she could in a flutter of joy and apprehension, had quite lost her appetite, and could only nervously sip her tea with her

eyes fixed as often as she dared to fix them upon her wonderful young son, whose beauty and bearing filled her with boundless rapture and surprise. She was not indeed surprised to see him as beautiful as an angel, for she had never thought of him as less so ; but this sort of beauty she now gazed at she had not reckoned on. This pale boy, with his great eyes, clearly cut features, pretty white teeth, and the glossy, dark, almost black hair which encased the whole, so little resembled the round little darling she had last seen when fondly dipping it in a bright eddying pool of the Rufus burn, that but for his marvellous likeness to his father she could hardly have known him. His eyes alone were unchanged, except in expression, and yet so different did they look when thus set in a thin, pale face, that she wondered as much at them as at his other features. But her wonder was as nothing to her awe. How was she to fondle and make of this perfect young gentleman, who seemed to expect to be addressed with grave politeness, and who handed her the honey-crystal with all the courtesy of a grown-up guest ? Poor girl, all her calculations were at fault ; the heaven she was in was not the sort of heaven she had been dwelling in by anticipation for months past. But was it less blissful ? Perhaps not ; nay, the reality went beyond anything she had imagined. This little dark-eyed angel beat all the angels of her fancy immeasurably. Had she tried to picture to herself Ebon as he would be when a young man, she might have indulged her mind with an ideal like this reality, for Angus Lockart was still to his unlucky wife the most noble-looking of men, and, in truth, the boy wanted but a little black beard to match his little face to make him a perfect little image of his

father. His every gesture and expression recalled her lost husband, startling her, and making her heart thrill with a sense of strangely mingling agony and joy. She had to close her teeth and put her delicate fingers round the arm of her chair like a vice, and with her whole strength restrain a burst of sobbing when she saw him unconsciously smile his father's slow, vivid, almost painfully expressive smile, whilst he watched the going down of the sun with eyes that seemed to take in the entire spectacle, and which yet had an inward-turned look, as if they were gazing also on a picture in his mind. Yes, the heaven she was in was in a sense even more blissful than that of her fond dreams ; the only drawback was that she hadn't rehearsed her enjoyment of its blessedness, and was wholly at a loss how to conduct herself in it. The babe of her bosom, which she had thought of as being probably now merely a good bit bigger and more independent than it was when torn from her arms, she would have known how to address, but with this little stranger—strange, and yet bewilderingly familiar—she had to make acquaintance, and that not as his long-lost mother come to sight again, but as a mere friend of his aunt's.

“ My papa said that if the sun set at Aunt Lucy’s I was to watch it, and think that papa was watching it at home,” was this solemn-eyed youngster’s first observation when at length the great red orb had dipped behind the mountain’s top.

The small treble voice, so different in compass from Lockart’s deep though ringing one, was yet essentially so like it that Dina was nearly overcome when she heard it, and only by changing her position suddenly could she conceal her emotion.

"Your Aunt Edith has often in her letters told me, dear," said Lucy, "how fond your papa is of having you on his knee at sunset."

"My papa likes to look at the sky, and he is very fond of me."

Again that diminutive echo, so to speak, of Lockhart's voice. The intonation of the words was accurately his. But if in voice, manner, and gesture the lad resembled his father as much as he resembled him in appearance that was no marvel, since his father was his constant companion, and from him it was that he had learned all his little airs and graces, his father being to him his chief example and model as well as playfellow.

"And does the sun set as beautifully here as it does at Beechworth, do you think, love?"

"Yes, aunt, it is prettier here. I wish my papa were here. Do you think he will come? I think it is not so far to heaven from here as at home. The beautiful sky looks nearer, and papa says that heaven, where my mamma is, is in the sky."

Tears that could not any longer be restrained dropped from poor Dina's eyes, and she got up with a look of entreaty at her sister. Lucy did not understand what she wished, and looked back inquiringly. Dina, trembling from head to foot, gazed at her beseechingly. What could she mean? Lucy slipped to her side to ask: "Oh, kiss him!" whispered Dina, scarcely able to command the words. Lucy now guessed her object. Her "companion" wanted an excuse for kissing the lad herself.

"My darling," cried Lucy, throwing her arms round her nephew, who had walked to the window as if to

get still nearer to the sky, "do you remember your mamma who, you say, is in heaven?"

"No, aunt, but papa says I shall see her by-and-by," replied the boy.

Thereupon Lucy kissed him two or three times and then dropped behind, whilst Dina, sick with impatience, fell upon him, passionately weeping, and hugged him and bound him to her heart in an ecstasy of fearful joy.

CHAPTER XL.

LOCKART did not forget his promise to watch the sun's going down from the Beechworth parlour. Reclining about eight o'clock on the sofa to which it was his habit to retire after dinner, he gazed dreamily towards the reddening horizon. Edith, who had been amusing herself, and indulging in her private thoughts in the garden, came in to tea while he was doing so, and, having filled a cup for Angus and another for herself, took her favourite seat on a stool beside the couch.

When, by-and-by, the sun had quite disappeared, Angus sighed, and took the cup which his sister held ready for him.

"Poor boy, I dare say he has not forgotten me yet," he said ; "I could almost believe that during the last few minutes I have seen him sitting silently feasting his eyes on the purpling clouds, and thinking of the parlour at home. His feelings are deep and lasting, and, child as he is, he will not, as I have sometimes foolishly feared, make new ties in three weeks that will interfere with old ones. I know his Aunt Lucy well. She will give him the best of everything, and treat him with, it may be, even too much indulgence, but his mind is of a higher order than hers."

"Do you know, I sometimes think you of a very jealous disposition, Angus," said Edith, looking up in his face with a smile. "How eager you are to monopolize Ebon's affections. Why shouldn't you think our pet may love 'Aunt Lucy' without forgetting you? I flatter myself that he is fond of his Aunt Edy, and yet he loves you none the less for that. I wonder how you would have felt towards him had—"

"Had my poor Di not left me, you would say, Edy. You may speak of her freely now. Jealous of her! That is a bright idea! I shall teach him all I can, now that she is known to be spotless, to place her first in his affections. First for her his little prayer shall rise to God. Of all beauty and virtue that is in woman hers shall be his highest ideal."

"And will it continue yours, Angus? Were you to see some woman as good as she was, could you not care for her also? Are you bound to a spirit though she be 'ranging with her peers' far away in some other world?"

"No, Edy; but remember our proverb, 'Don't marry a widow unless her first husband was hanged.' Something to the same effect may be said of a widower. What sort of life would any woman lead with me whilst I remember what Dina was? Would not I be for ever making, mentally at least, disparaging comparisons? Of course I couldn't hide them from my new wife if I made them, for a woman knows everything her husband thinks, take what pains he may to conceal it, and that, indeed, most certainly when he does take pains to conceal it."

"Nonsense, dear, I seldom guess what you are thinking of, and I don't believe I could be jealous of any

woman not alive, let my husband think what he might of her. The nicest girl I know, too, is quite as little afraid of angel rivals."

"Ha, you've been sounding my friend Miss Grange on that point, have you? I like her very well, Edy; but, oh, she's a long, long way behind my poor one!"

"She's the dearest girl possible, Angus, and in her way as good as any one in the world."

"Her own way, yes. In her own way she's very well indeed, very!"

"Well, Angus, if her own way is quite different from poor Dina's way, why vex yourself with comparisons, which between things of a different nature are surely quite out of place?"

Lockart, smiling, patted his sister's head, and after meditating for a few minutes, remarked,—

"It is very odd, Edy, that since the truth came out about Ebon's mother, not only has the whole earth brightened in my sight, but this scheme of yours has seemed to me less absurd than it did. Is it not strange that that which has revived and increased my passion for the wronged dead, should have made the idea of a new tie with one alive seem less the subject for a passing jest to me than it was but the other day?"

"Perhaps Dina's supposed offence made you dislike her whole sex."

"Not so, Edy, it had that effect for only a very short time: then I was little better than a raving fool, but for many a day now I have been tolerably rational; and then have not I always had my little Edy to keep me right? Pretty sister, what a comfort you've been to me! Do you mean, dear, to devote your life to your

old brother, and for his sake never to marry, but always to supply to him the place of that other?"

The brother's smile was sad even in its playfulness, and Edith blushed and looked down.

"Ah, even in jest such a question is hardly fair," he added quickly; "I know of old your affection for my good friend Ralph Eagle, and believe me, dear, that should you make up your mind—"

"Angus!"

"Well, Edy?"

"How could you?"

"Speak of so delicate a subject? Well, I sha'n't, if you'd rather leave him to talk it over with me. By the way—to change the subject and spare your blushes—has that glorious girl, Major Lushet's younger daughter,—Bracy, don't they call her?—been long engaged to the active little fellow who is so fond of babies that he perils his neck to get them out of scrapes?"

"She isn't a bit engaged to him."

"Ah, not publicly, but you saw how she took charge of him when his ankle was supposed to need nursing this morning."

"She's very forward."

"I wouldn't say that, Edy; I believe they are fast friends. Not that I see what could have made such a magnificent creature take to a little scraggy chap like that—though, to be sure, a merciful dispensation of nature does incline tall women to little men oftener than one could expect."

"You are very abusive, Angus dear. Captain Calvert is good-looking, and not in the least 'scraggy.'"

"Oh, Edy! what! a pale-faced, invisible-moustached, scanty-haired, sharp-nosed, pale-eyed, girl-handed lad

like that good-looking? You must have seen him with Miss Bracy's eyes. So you're in the secret, eh, and so fond of your friend Bracy that you've sworn to defend her choice at all hazards? Well, it's no affair of mine."

"He doesn't care for Bracy."

"Not care for Bracy? What a want of taste the fellow must have! Why, she's one of the very finest women I ever had the luck to see. A good height, perfectly proportioned, a face of almost oriental beauty, and but twenty. Not care for Bracy! and she so tender of his ankle, so careful that his coffee should be sugared, and his bacon done to a turn! Why, I saw her withdraw a slice from his plate during breakfast because it was too much browned. She thought it would disagree with him. Did you think I had no eyes for my neighbours' doings?"

"I think you might employ them better, Angus. One can see at a glance that Bracy wouldn't suit Captain Calvert. You had better take her yourself, dear, since you admire her so much."

"Oh, the pretty satire! I think it would be very fine, indeed, to have such a wife. Such a noble lady—the stateliest halls would be graced by her majestic presence. The sauciest servitors must feel a pride in humbling their heads before her. But she's not the thing for Calvert, forsooth. Little you know of such matters, Edy. It is those dry, thin, blighted little men that most worship your luxuriant growths."

"Oh, Angus, I never heard you speak so strangely before. Marian says Captain Calvert is most interesting looking and exceeding handsome, though not very tall. Blighted, indeed!"

"Not *very* tall! ha, ha! and Miss Marian prefers

that style of man, does she? Fair, grey-eyed, slight, and—let it be confessed—small; what chance then should I have; oh, Edith, were I to—”

“She wasn’t thinking for herself, about Captain Calvert. She was merely giving her impartial opinion of him.”

“My poor child, how this sly rogue Calvert has come round you already! Why, you haven’t known him any time to speak of.”

“What do you mean, Angus? You are quite rude to-night, and almost coarse, I must say.”

“Such a pretty indignation! How the gentle heart grows fiery, and the ivory forehead flushes! I did but jest, dear. That lithe, frank-eyed young officer, whose services in the mutiny were so remarkable, and of whose generous courage we have just had so striking a proof, is a man after my own heart, Edy.”

Edith laid her face for a moment on her brother’s arm, and secretly kissed his sleeve, then turning away her head to hide her blushes, she retreated to the table, and busied herself in preparing another cup of tea.

“Nor do I really think him at all ill-favoured,” continued Angus in his cool way. “His face is agreeable, and the openness of his expression exceedingly pleasing.”

“There is an ugly scar on his head,” said Edith, still handling the teapot.

“A mark to be proud of. Ah, what a slashing cut that must have been which made it!”

Edith shuddered, and couldn’t find a bit of sugar of the right size for several seconds, though she shook the lumps noisily together.

“His manners, too, are excellent,” Lockart went on. “Gentlemanlike in no ordinary degree.”

"Did you not see how awkward he was when Miss Lushet took possession of him before breakfast?" said Edith.

"Ah, he certainly looked embarrassed; but what would you have? When a man's in love he is hardly himself, Edy. Yes, I have observed that he actually blushes, the bronzed little warrior! when his beautiful beloved lavishes her sweet looks upon him; but in a man of known valour one likes a touch of modesty. Nothing becomes the hero more; and, to speak seriously, slender and comparatively short as Calvert is, I did not wonder at the tender interest with which he has succeeded in inspiring the exuberant daughter of a distinguished, though ill-requited officer."

Edith returned to her seat with her brother's cup. He was in one of his provoking humours, she thought, and she'd be on her guard lest he should put her out again.

"Miss Bracy will take very good care of him," resumed the brother, after drinking some of the tea, which, as could hardly have been expected, was rightly sugared. "People may smile, and cut sly jests about miles and mile-stones, but she will have every reason to feel proud of him; and that she will make him thoroughly comfortable no one who saw her this morning could doubt."

Edith remained silent, and merely tossed her sweet head ever so slightly.

"But tender-hearted as she seems with him," Angus added perseveringly, "mind how you allow him to rouse her jealousy, my fair sister. I saw the truant, who no doubt likes a minute's change now and then,—*toujours* Bracy even cloying his palate, perhaps,—talking and

walking with you this morning, when he might fairly have been expected at Miss Lushet's side. Of course, even though you were able to overlook the 'ugly scar on his head,' you would hardly think of rivalling Miss Bracy ; but, my dear, let me warn you that there may be danger even in your good-natured indulgence of the youth's taste for variety—danger in letting him pay you such pretty attentions as certain that I noticed during our lunch in the hay-field for example. Don't let your good-nature nor yet your love of fun tempt you to irritate that powerful woman—”

“ Ha, ha, what a notion, Angus !”

“ You slender child ! why, that big Bracy, soft and indolent though she looks, could squeeze you like a boa-constrictor, and might have the heart to do it, who knows. Look at her eyebrows, how they meet, set, and level themselves when the lady's wrath is kindled. I've seen her honeyed lips, too, lose their rich colour, and grow pale and tight over her exquisite but keen-edged teeth.”

“ When, Angus ?”

“ Not to-day, dear ; no, as yet I have not observed that the truant's levity or your playful encouragement of it have touched her deeply. I only warn you of what she is capable. But you are such a high-spirited and proud bit lass, that perhaps I am only stimulating you to risk the great Bracy's anger. I should have pled with you for her, and besought you not lightly to wound her loving heart by letting her betrothed see too much of azure eyes which all who see must love !”

“ I do not know what to think of you, Angus. You are quizzing either Bracy, or me, or Captain Calvert, without the least regard to rhyme or reason, and I've a

great mind to get into a rage with you. I'm not afraid of Bracy or any one ; and she has no claim upon Captain Calvert, who is not engaged to her and never was. He's not a bad sort of man, and if I like to chat with him now and then, why, I will. I've no taste for sitting alone, and I will even flirt with Ar—, with Captain Calvert, when I've nothing better to do."

" Hurra ! we will, and we will, and we will, like our own obstinate selves. Well, I've warned you,—the leopard has claws !"

CHAPTER XLI.

"AH, VIDOCQ, my fine fellow, imagine what I have heard to your prejudice. You told me yesterday, after the arrival of my Dresden letter, containing proof of the innocence of Lady Lockart, that Annette lately, while ill, confessed having invented that villainous story about her mistress's doings with Alfred von Beinherz, which you brought to me about three years ago with tears in your eyes, relating how it had, in a moment of over-trustfulness, been confided to you. Conceive, then, the astonishment with which I learnt this morning, from another source, that Miss Annette, while declaring, as in your version of her statement, the perfect innocence of her lady, coolly asserts that the whole slander against her was made up, not by herself, but by *you*, and that in order to have her, Annette, disgraced—you being enraged against her by her contemptuous rejection of your addresses, my gallant little Vidocq! Stop! that water is too hot. My feet are tender to-night, the soles especially, owing to my attempts to walk while at Ashcroft. That will do. Have the jug of cold water ready to pour over them the very moment I place them in the other tub. You have forgotten to put my towels on the fender. They must be quite hot, to assist the reaction. I shouldn't

sleep a wink if I went to bed with cold feet. Well, concerning this accusation of you by Annette, what am I to think ? Had you aspersed Lady Lockart wantonly merely to have her maid dismissed and disgraced, as Annette is said to suppose you did, you would have acted the part of a fool, or an idiot. I used to think you anything but a fool. I thought you unusually sensible and quick-witted,—c'est à dire, habile, subtil ; vous entendez ?”

“ Monsieur is very good for me.”

“ I do not flatter ; but if Annette speaks the truth now, my opinion of you was absurd, and I was myself a fool. Were we both idiots, you and I ?”

“ Ah, Monsieur !”

“ Well, I think not ; at least, however weakly credulous I may have been, your consistent behaviour ever since those sad days has proved you a man of parts, un homme adroit et d'une intelligence supérieure, and I must frankly say that of such a man Annette's story, that he committed such an atrocity merely to vex her, is quite incredible. But, to make sure, I put it to you, in whose honesty and sense I, Angus Lockart, long implicitly trusted,—did you, in some fit of infatuation, really so forget yourself ? Tell me ?”

“ Oh, Monsieur ! Je sais prendre bien la plaisanterie !”

“ You did not ? How then, assuming the correctness of my friend's report, shall we account for Annette's strange assertion regarding you ? Must we think that she, through long-cherished malice, tells lies even on her sick-bed, hoping that they may come to my ears and thus effect your ruin ; or does she really believe what she says ? You shake your head ; but let us consider, may it not be possible to exonerate her without

finding you guilty? What does she say? That you devised the slander in order to disgrace her. She may have had some sort of reason to believe that you did devise it, and being, as is certain, on bad terms with you, she may have imagined you wished to injure her. That you invented such a story with no other object is, as I have said, incredible, but with excited feelings poor Annette may have thought you bad enough for anything. What shadow of excuse could she, however, have for thinking that you originated the slander, if, in fact, you, as you told me, heard it first from her? The thing is simple—some other person may have put together the story against her lady, and then told Annette that he got it from you. Indignant, she would charge you with the crime; and when you, after, let me suppose, confusedly hearing her, innocently brought the tale to me as a confession made by Annette of her lady's misdeeds, and so had my unhappy wife disgraced, the hasty maid may have seen in that a proof that her informant was right in saying that the slanderous accusations of herself and her mistress which she had heard originated in your malice. Thus, even to this day, Annette may truly think you guilty. Clever as you are, my little Vidocq, you did not about that time so readily understand English as you understand it now, hence it is really not extravagant to suppose that when the angry girl poured into your astonished ears a probably long and rambling account of what she had heard that you accused her of doing, you so sadly misapprehended her meaning as to believe that she was taking you into her confidence regarding things that her mistress had done with her connivance. Horrified, you quarrelled with her instantly—so you

assured me, I remember—and thus, in your passion, deprived her of every opportunity of making it clear to you that she was only calling you to account for what she believed you to have said to her prejudice."

"Ah, monsieur est d'un esprit vif!"

"But how, Vidocq, can this explanation, contrived for Annette's benefit, be made to fit your friend's assertion (that which you told me of yesterday), that Annette has now confessed to having invented the story about her lady with the object of humiliating you by the disgrace of your master's wife?"

"Effectively, monsieur is so clever, that—"

"That he can see how even this may be done. Well, you do me but justice, my boy. Yes; may not we argue thus,—your friend, an old fellow-servant, I think you called him, had doubtless heard of the story you told me about Annette having confided an account of her wickedness to you while we were in Brussels on our way home from Dresden, and when, the other day, he was told of her solemn declaration that my wife was really innocent of all the things she had been accused of, he would consider that equal to a *confession* that the whole slander was an invention of her own. In this way, we may, you see, somewhat reconcile the two accounts of what Annette has stated on her sick-bed, and so have the double satisfaction of thinking that she was not the wretch you consider her, and that, on the other hand, you told me nothing but what you believed to be true."

"Leave, monsieur, that I kiss the hand. Monsieur est plein de bonté pour tout le monde. It is incredible —c'est incroyable comme—"

"How I contrive to whitewash you, eh? It is in-

deed astonishing ; but after having placed confidence in you for years, I cannot be anxious to find that I have been cruelly made game of—c'est à dire, persiflé sans pitié, ou, plutôt, moqué amèrement ;—that, in short, I have been an ass, un imbécile. Should I wish to think so ill of myself, that is, in other words, to think you a villain ? No, assuredly not, you would say, and I agree with you ; and yet, alas ! my little Vidocq, can I indeed dare to congratulate myself on my discernment in esteeming you so highly as I have done for some years ?"

" Ah, monsieur—pas encore ?"

" Not yet, and that is very hard on you, you think.—A little more hot water. Steady, or you'll scald my legs.—Hard on you, and yet you cannot expect me to accept fancies and theories of my own as *proofs* one way or the other. You have too much good sense for that, and you will not expect me to be satisfied until the enemy is discovered ; who, if my theory meet the facts, told lies to Annette, and so indirectly gave rise to your belief in my wife's guilt, your report to me, and all the dire calamities which followed."

" Monsieur, I go to do all this that is possible to find him—le scélérat exécutable !"

" I agree with you, Vidocq, that the person who slandered Lady Lockart, and so drove her to madness, and, in her madness, at length to self-destruction, must be an execrable villain, whatever his motive was ; and you will understand my meaning, I hope, when I assure you that it is my fondest desire to flay him alive—l'écorcher vif ; ay, and with my own hands—les mains que vous voyez : les voilà, Monsieur Vidocq ! Ah, la vengeance terrible et délicieuse !—Steady, steady ! how

your hand shakes, fellow. Surely you have not taken to drinking. You've made it too hot now. I'll put them in the other tub for the cold water. Souse them well ; that is, pour it right over them. Good ; your hand shakes less. Ah, my boy, it will require steadier fingers than yours to take the ‘exécrable scélérat’s’ skin off nicely in long narrow stripes. Slowly, slowly !—O la vengeance délicieuse !—Now for the hot towels. Put the stockings nearer the fire. That will do. No doubt your nerves received a shock from the lightning last night ; for, in truth, you never were given to drink, Vidocq ?”

“ Pas si bête, monsieur.”

“ Not so silly ?—Oh, then, surely not such an ass as to have slandered your lady, who was so dear to me. Don’t rub so hard, I beg ; ‘twasn’t my feet we agreed to flay—écorcher !”

“ Hé, hé, monsieur is funny. Monsieur est farceur et bien drôle, if monsieur permit that I have the hardness to say this.”

“ I accept the compliment, my merry Vidocq. Now for the stockings. Ha, my feet feel revived already. They strengthen hourly. How glad my Vidocq will be when he beholds me running about again like a boy. Shall not we have leaping matches together over the fences ?”

“ I am happy, if monsieur permit.”

“ Ah truly, happy to see me growing stout and strong once more. Who should doubt it ? Has not your devotion been proved by a service of many years. Have we not been like brothers together, oh, my trusty one ? And if glad to see me growing well, how heartbroken you would have been had the fire injured me last night !

Nay, do not cry. I can measure your sorrow without that. I can imagine too what it is to suffer from a constitutional nervousness in thunderstorms. I will not speak of the anguish with which you must look back upon having been found wanting in such an emergency. Truly, the flames were rapid, and in another moment I should have been enveloped in them."

"Monsieur sait bien mon dévouement."

"Yes, Vidocq, I think I can estimate it.—My dressing gown; I don't mean to go to bed just yet. I shall not require you again to-night. Bon-soir."

"Good-night, monsieur."

"Certainly that is, after all, an inscrutable rogue, and I am like a child playing with edged tools when I try my wit on him. He is such a consummate actor that I never can be sure what effect my speeches really produce. Apparently at this moment I have the whip-hand of him, and yet I feel it probable that he has seen through all my artifices, and has been playing with me. Which of us is the cat, and which the mouse, I cannot determine. That he is the villain I take him for can no longer be doubted. How I could ever have been so blinded to his treachery is more than I can imagine, when I see the restless, prying, and yet shrinking habit of his eye, and the falseness of his smile. Ah, what chance have I in the use of finesse with an accomplished double-dealer who has been in the habit of winding me round his finger? What was my aim to-night? Let me review it,—To lull him into a state of comfortable confidence, 1st, by suggesting that my *amour propre* was enlisted in his defence—that it would be humiliating to me to find that I had trusted him foolishly; 2^d, by showing that I could see how the reports that have

come to my ears might be reconciled with his own assertions ; 3d, by affecting to feel some confidence in his bare word still ; and *lastly*, by leading him to suppose that I am likely to waste time in hunting up some unknown enemy. An ingenious enough plan, though possibly neither honourable nor honest. Neither, I fear ; and yet at this moment I do not see how I can avoid defending myself in some such way until I obtain such proofs of his guilt as will justify me in openly accusing him. Besides, how but by finesse can I hope to punish him ? A mere dismissal would be but a poor substitute for the flaying he so richly deserves, and of which it surely becomes me, the widower of his victim, to be the instrument. An ingenious plan ; yes, but did it work ? Did not he, the astute hypocrite, see through it, and laugh in his sleeve at my simplicity in thinking that I was out-maneuvring him ? Was he imposed upon by the air of frankness with which I announced having heard a version of Annette's sick-bed admissions or assurances that conflicted with that which he had given me on the authority of some old fellow-servant ? I told it to him playfully, making light of it by speaking in the same breath of hot water and towels. He smiled, and seemed to believe that I attached no importance to it. Was that cunning on his part ? I affected unwillingness to believe that I had been made a fool of by him, and he seemed to think I really shrank from this mortification. I justly spoke of his intelligence, and sincerely declared it impossible that he could have been so idiotic as to slander my lady merely to punish her maid, and then with pretty well-acted simplicity asked if, in a moment of infatuation, he really had been so foolish. What a withering and but ill-con-

cealed scorn there was in the smile with which he replied that he knew how to take a joke ! This scorn was real, but not intended to be seen if he thought that I put the question in simplicity, expecting him honestly to confess if guilty. But if he suspected that I was acting, he meant me to see the scornful smile, and assumed it to make me believe that he was imposed upon by my acting, and actually thought me simple. He is clever enough for that. But whatever view one may take of the smile, his reply that he knew how to take a ‘plaisanterie’ was surely very fine. How much stronger a negative it was than a simple denial would have been ! Had I been really asking him about his guilt, in the simplicity of my heart, it was calculated to set my mind at rest effectually ; and had I been playing upon him, it was just the kind of answer to make me fancy that I was acting well, and really passing for simple and confiding in his eyes. Well may I say that I prattle with edged tools when I try to outwit Vidocq ; my hand may be cut to the bone when I least expect it. Then I proposed a way of reconciling his version and Wilmotte’s of what Annette lately said when ill, and very much more alive than she has hitherto shown herself to the importance of exposing a villany. Vidocq kissed my hand in a rapture at my apparently self-misleading shrewdness in fancying how he might be innocent, and at my amiability in trying to defend Annette also—or he affected rapture, to lead me on in complacent assurance of my success in gulling him by affecting to see how his assertion that Annette had made admissions to him was compatible with her innocence and her belief that the slander originated with him. But presently I passed from an air of good-

natured willingness, to put the kindest construction upon everything, to a threatening air of strictness, and of being resolved to have proofs. Here his hand shook as he poured the water. After all, he found that he had not quite escaped, and he was alarmed. Could this, too, be pretence? Then he would, forsooth, eagerly trace out the ‘scélérat,’ whose existence I had kindly imagined. Was this also to humour me, or did he think that I believed in an unknown enemy? And now, at this point, trusting that I had set his mind at rest regarding any immediate suspicions of him, I began his punishment by hinting at my eagerness to flay the real criminal. Vidocq’s hand shook more at this, and he visibly trembled, apparently at the fate that might await him should he after all be found out. He trembled, and afterwards, at my very small jest, laughed nervously. Now, did this show his guilt in unmistakable colours? was he actually in fear, or had I but another instance of his clever hypocrisy? What motive could he have in appearing afraid, or in showing fear, that is, practically, in pleading guilty? None, surely, unless he felt certain that I knew of his guilt, and was pretending to think him innocent in order to torture him slowly. If this was his view, then throughout the conversation he was trying to humour me by pretending to be taken in by my affectation of thinking him innocent. Knowing himself found out, but seeing that I was in no hurry to come down with my full revenge upon him, he might hope by humouring me to gain an opportunity of slipping through my fingers ere I should choose openly to accuse him. And, truth to say, the trouble I took to appear to see how he could be innocent was perhaps in itself enough to suggest the nature of my game to

his ready wit. Well, well, I know of no limit to his guile, and I may indeed be the mouse, he the cat ; but as I cannot read his mind, I must be content in the meanwhile to assume, that so far I have in fact played my cards well,—obtained additional evidence of his guilt, actually lulled his suspicions of my knowledge of his treachery, and, at the same time, made him tremble with dismay both at my proposed revenge and at the acuteness which, I trust, was mingled with my seeming simplicity. Perhaps, though, at the very last I overdid my part, when sarcastically alluding to his devotion to me, and particularly to his gladness at my rapid recovery. Unsuspicious of me before, that may have sufficed to alarm him, and he may at this moment be darkly brooding over our conversation, and sharpening his wit for another encounter. Yet, why should I think a few words of ironical compliment likely to disturb him, when I have often spoken more strongly in his praise, when I really believed in his faithfulness and affection ? However, make a note of this, that unless his eyes are opened very slowly it will be impossible to skin him satisfactorily before the final blow-up. Am I cruel ? the law will hardly avenge poor Dina, I fear. Is he then to go unchastised by man ? Having these three years reaped a rich harvest from his crime, is he to be allowed to slip away upon a simple dismissal to enjoy his ill-gotten gains in his own country ? A truce to such folly ! Is he not a devil—the devil incarnate ? Should the very devil be spared when we have him in our grasp ? ‘ Grasp,’ ha, ha, ha ! when the noose is fairly round my slippery thief’s neck it will be time enough to speak of mercy. Bless my rejuvenescent heart, I could be merry ! I am growing light-hearted.

What, at the foretaste of human blood ? Have I then vampire-turned after all these purifying years of trial ? Oh, my wronged one ; now that I know thee to be a light in heaven, should I not, rejoicing, spare ? Fain would I, white-robed, be with thee—how then dare I in the blood of vengeance to dip my nerveless hand ? Deluding thought !—Imbecile that I am ! is it not the devil's own voice that thus would trick me of my prey ?”

CHAPTER XLII.

"I HAD words wi' him yesterday about Maggie, an' he's no like tae show his face here again this while," said Kate Gowans, plucking the blossoms of a whin-bush, as she sat on a stile between one of the Ashcroft shrubberies and a corn-field.

A pitcher of water stood at her feet, and she was on her way home from the well beyond Widow Doherty's cottage.

"Whar's he gaun to, Kate?"

Tom Crocket, Kate's cousin and first wooer, stood beside the stile, leaning on it and gazing admiringly at the girl's rosy cheeks. He it was who addressed her.

"The hielands, I'm thinking; leastways he asked me tae gang north wi' him," she replied, tossing her head.

"And what for wad ye no gang, Katie, lass?"

"Never you mind, Tam. 'Twasna for you I bided, ony ways."

"No, ye dinna mind aboot me. Gie's a kiss, though."

"Get oot wi' ye. Ye'd plenty yesterday tae serve ye for a year or twa. I'm gey sulky the day, an' ye'd better keep aff. Weel, let that content ye. Ye'll carry the pitcher hame, will ye no?"

"Willingly, lass, and yersel' tae, if ye like."

" Ha, ha; Pike nicht hae dune that, but ye're no fit."

" Sae ye're aye hankerin' after Pike yet?"

" What for no, Tam ? He's bigger than you at ony rate, an' I weel-nigh forgot ye when he was by, that's the truth."

" Weel, Kate, ye're but flichtie. Ye've no heard onything like that o' me, I'm sure."

" I daursay no, wha'd tak up wi' the like o' you ? I kent ye'd be waiting yer lane till I wearied o' Pike, sae I jist havered on wi' him."

" So ye thocht o' me a' the while, Kate ?"

" I fashed my head very little aboot ye, man. Ye warna ower here very often tae keep me in mind o' ye."

" That wasna ma fault. The Captain had me oot ridin' wi' him sae often ; and when he's in the hoose I must be in tae. Then, mind ye, we were in London a while. I'm no angry wi' you for thinkin' o' Pike, when ye had him by ye every day, and I was sae far away. Oot o' sicht's oot o' mind wi' bonny anes like you, and we callants just hae tae put up wi' that."

" Nane o' yer blarney, Tam, I willna say but I'm richt glad ye've cast up again."

" Especially noo that Pike's gane aff !"

" I aye had my doots o' Pike. There was a fausness in his ways whiles that made me carefu' wi' him even when he was maist kindly. I ken noo what he is, an' ye needna fash ony mair aboot him, for he's been clean oot o' my graces since ever I got sicht o' Maggie wi' her bairn."

" Are ye gaun tae keep her ? I've a pound-note tae gie ye for her frae the Captain."

" Let's see't. Ay—Bank o' Scotland. Weel, that's real guid o' him, considering what he's already dune for

her, or her bairn, at ony rate. She'll be nane the waur o' it. Miss Lockart was for giein' me siller for her, but as the lassie was bidin' wi' us at the time, I couldna weel tak it, I thocht. Hooever, noo that she's wi' the auld grannie, I'll tak the Captain's note for her, and Miss Lockart's siller tae, if she's mindfu' tae think o' it again."

"My bonny Kate, what a guid lass ye are! I might hae feared that ye'd raither hae been like tae flee in that lassie's face for kennin' Pike sae weel."

"Had she come atween Pike and me, or atween you an' me, Tam, nae doot I'd no hae felt kindly tae her, but 'twas me that cam atween her and Pike, and wha kens but he might hae been less hard tae her if he'd never seen me?"

"That's true, but mony a lass wadna hae been sae thochtfu' as tae think o' it, Katie, dear."

"Noo, Tam, I dinna like sleekit tongues. 'Twas aye wi' speeches like that that Pike used tae win roond me, sae I'm sick o' them. No but what ye may be ceevil; and ye've been that since ever the Captain learnt ye."

"I wadna be ashamed tae learn onything frae the Captain."

"Like eneuch. Where's he the day, by-the-bye?"

"He's awa tae toun wi' the young ledgies in the carriage. Aboot three o'clock he's to be at the Dingle wi' the whale femily—the Laird an' a'."

"Ay, Sir Angus's coachman was saying yesterday that he wad hae tae drive Sir Angus and Miss Lockart doun. It'll be an oot o' doors dance, maist likely. They've aye twa or three aboot the shearin' time."

"D'ye ken weel aboot that Miss Lockart, Kate?"

I'm thinkin' the Captain's sweet on her mair than on the ither."

" Which ither?"

" Miss Lushet, ye ken; the big ane wi' the red roses in her bonnet."

" Ou ay, *she's* a whapper, but no tae compare in other ways wi' Miss Edith, wha's a pet o' mine. Will Sir Angus be for lettin' his sister tak up wi' the Captain?"

" Hang it, Kate, I've no seen the lady that's ower guid for the Captain."

" I've heard ye say that afore, Tam. Dootless it's 'cause ye're wi' him that ye think sae meikle o' yersel --like maister, like man."

" Weel, it's no every ane I'd serve wi', Miss Kate. But it's no for lang noo even wi' him. He's gaun tae the Indies in twa or three months frae this, an' I'm gaun tae stay at hame wi' you, Kate."

" Wi' me, Tam? Ye'd better ask my leave first."

" Oh, dinna toss yer heid sae. I'll ask ye fast eneuch, an' if ye wi'na let on that I'm welcome tae bide, why, I'm off wi' the Captain, wha was keen for me tae gang wi' him; an' a while it'll be afore ye see Tam Crocket again, lass."

" Meikle I care. Ye can gang yer ways roond the warld for me, Tam. There are lads eneuch forbye Pike tae keep me frae wearying."

" Ah, but ye'll no be fractious, dearie. I can haud a plough as weel as ever, still; and there's puir Sandie Morrison's house standing empty. It wad suit us fine."

" Wad ye even me tae Sandie Morrison's bit biggin', ye haveril?"

" Three rooms, and a scullery sort o' a place at the end, Kate."

"Three rooms ! It's just a but and a ben, wi' puddles o' mud up tae the very hearthstanes ; for a spring has broken through the wa' ; and Sandie died o' the rheumatiz."

"The Laird 'll set that richt. Ye ken he never spares when it's to mak the folks' hooses snug. Look what his faither did for auld Mrs. Doherty's family. Bless my eyes, but ye might put up a toun in her hoose !"

"Weel, she's gotten a guid few in it the noo, for she's ta'en in puir Maggie and her bairn the day. She'll keep her, she says, till Pike comes back tae mak an honest woman o' her, if she's no that already, as I mair than think she is."

"Then, Kate, I'm dootfu' Maggie 'll be a gude while there."

"I'm feared she will. I wish I'd been cannier wi' Pike yesterday ; but my temper got the upper hand, and I couldna help payin' him back for his lees. My certie but I gave it him when he cam roond tae get his wages frae ma faither yestreen, jist afore he went aff wi' his bundle."

"Ye're weel rid o' him, Kate ; and sae's Maggie, may be. I ne'er set eyes on a darker hoond."

"Hoond, Tam, he's a king to the like o' you, man, wi' yer sleeket yellow hair and roond dumplin' cheeks. There's no a man in Scotland tae compare wi' him when he hauds his heid up. Whar did ye ever see twa black een like his, or sich hair—like a craw's wing : no a bit less black and glossy. An' you, ye blind-fair dotterel, wad be for—."

"Ha, ha, now but I will : there ! and there ! You do look sae grand ; what a cutty ye are, my bonnie Kate. There, and there, and there ! Now, will ye keep a

ceeviler tongue in yer heid for Tam Crocket, and haver less aboot that—but I've no occasion to say hard things o' him."

"Weel, Tam, ye're a saucy lad. I scarce thocht ye'd sae meikle spunk, man. I willna say but Sandie's hoose, puir man, nicht suit us efter a."

"Ah, dearie, I kent ye'd think better o' it. Come noo, it'll be as sune as the Captain's awa tae India, and that'll be in October, he says."

"No, Tam, I'm gaun tae keep ye waitin' for a year or twa yet, just tae see hoo ye behave yersel', and tae gie ye time tae learn tae speak English like the Captain and the leddies at the ha'. What for will ye aye fa' intae ye're Scotch again? D'ye think I canna understand English?"

"Well, Kate, my love, it's kindlier like to speak our own tongue when courting. There; that's English."

"But wha was coortin'? Ye dinna ca' this coortin', surely: ye've na gien me abune—Get aff wi' ye! I dinna want nae mair. Tak up the pitcher and mak yersel usefu', man. They'll be crying oot for me ore this tae mak the parritch."

"Ah, Katie, lass, I'm blithe tae serve ye."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE mansion-house of Dingleheath, commonly called the Dingle, is partly new, and partly old. The old and new are not run together and blended as at Ashcroft, but stand side by side, unaffectedly contrasting, and acknowledging themselves to be what they are. The drawing-room is, as may be supposed, in the modern half of the dwelling. Its long windows face west, and open on to a broad terrace, guarded by a low wall, along which in summer a dozen large vases of Tom Thumb geraniums, or, according to the new and undesirable nomenclature, *pelargoniums*, are set at intervals. From the middle of the terrace, a few steps lead down to a spacious bowling-green or lawn, of which the mossy turf—bitten every other morning whilst the dew is on it by a light machine, drawn by a donkey in smooth-soled boots—is always compact and velvety. Upon the banks which enclose the green is a gravel walk, beyond which are flower-plots cut out in turf. To the north, a dense and well-grown shrubbery of evergreens gives shelter from the north. At a greater distance, on the west side, a spruce plantation arrests, or, at least, breaks the force of the prevailing western gales. To the south the landscape is open.

Such is a part of the pleasant demain at which the
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ex-judge Mr. Melville and his family usually spend their summers. This season a variety of engagements had detained them in town until the beginning of August, and it was therefore with even more than her usual delight that Mrs. Melville, the laird's mother, found herself once more in the pure and reviving air of her country home.

To-day, chairs, couches, and tables from the drawing-room, of which all the windows have been thrown back, are set out on the terrace, where, in her Bath-chair, and with her gouty feet duly packed on the foot-board, sits the bright old lady ready to receive her guests.

Three o'clock had not yet struck, when, with praiseworthy punctuality, these began to arrive. The invited were a few of the neighbouring families, besides the Lockarts and Granges, and, by way of seasoning, some half-dozen gentlemen from town.

First arrived the Granges, closely followed by the Beechworth carriage. From the latter jumped Archer Calvert, who had been picked up at Ashcroft, Sir Angus having remembered that the Granges could fill their brougham without him. Having handed out Miss Lockart, Archer assisted her brother to descend into his chair, which had arrived chained to the back of his carriage, where it passed very well for a rumble seat. Other guests came up in such quick succession that the wide circle of gravel in front of the mansion was speedily crowded. For a moment a guide seemed wanting, and then Mr. Grange, assuming that office, led the way round the south-west corner of the new side of the house to the terrace already described, which on such occasions as the present was the usual place of reception.

He greeted his mother-in law, Mrs. Melville, in a deferential yet familiar manner, which sufficiently evinced the good terms on which he stood with her, and then he made way for Sir Angus Lockart, who, having run his wheel-chair briskly along the smooth-rolled walk, stopped it a few yards short of the old lady's seat, and limped the rest of the way to her with the assistance of his sticks.

"Happy I am, indeed, to see you on your feet, Sir Angus," said Mrs. Melville as she offered her hand. "This is a great advance. Next time I trust we shall have you tripping the light fantastic toe among our gayest young folk. And young you are still; I, at least, was young five and fifty years ago when just your age."

Angus, bowing very low in reverence, was softened by her kind words, but did not attempt any verbal reply, courtesy, in fact, obliging him to yield his place to the new-comers flocking behind him towards the hostess's chair.

The party complete, or nearly so, Mary Melville presently struck a table bell, and in a few minutes a number of domestics of both sexes were busy handing round plates and dishes of delicate cold meats.

By-and-by, Mrs. Melville and Lockart drew together again, much as if their invalid chairs had a sympathy for each other, and soon the baronet averred that he was most fortunately situated in being beside the old lady, since of all the dainties pressed upon her by her attentive grand-daughters he came in for a share—not that he partook of many, but it was, he said, a satisfaction to his mind to think that whatever was going he was sure to get the offer of it. Such a joke would have

come well from Mr. Grange, whose appetite was exceedingly catholic, but from Lockart, who ate with indifference, it had rather the effect of self-satire.

"But Mr. Grange has just told me," said Mrs. Melville, taking the latter view of his remark, "that you are beginning to enjoy again the good things of this life, and may be expected to become quite a lovable man in the course of a few weeks! For my part, Sir Angus, I have always eaten in moderation, but with perfect enjoyment of everything of which it seemed to me good to partake. I think with my son-in-law, who is a noble evidence of the soundness of his doctrines, that to live healthily we must eat heartily—not to excess or near it—but with our hearts for the time in what we are about. A meal partaken of peevishly, and as an unwelcome task keeping us from some more congenial employment, is sure to disagree with us; and, as Grange says, everything that disagrees with us sours the temper, embitters and shortens life! There, that's a prescription worth Parr's pills any day!"

The delightful old lady smiled and nodded, and her venerable lips disappeared as usual between her chin and her beak-like nose, while her eyes sparkled behind her pebble-eyed spectacles, and her rosy round cheeks glowed and dimpled, and contrasted oddly with the ancient hair, which in tight little curls encompassed her face.

Lockart, with a somewhat penitent expression, admitted the justness of her remarks, but pleaded the difficulty of enjoying one's meals without an appetite.

"But do you cultivate your appetite?" cried the old lady with animation. "Come, come, I know your ways; Edith has betrayed you. You read, or write, or

think studiously, or brood over the irremediable sorrows of your life—far be it from me to speak lightly of them—up to the ringing of the dinner-bell, and then, having left yourself barely time to put off your study-coat, and let that rascal Vidocq brush your hair, you go off in a brown study to the dining-room, and sit down to a meal which you carve mechanically, hardly knowing, and never caring whether it consist of fish, flesh, or fowl, either, all, or something else. Carelessly you eat what you can, thinking all the while of the subject which has been occupying your mind for hours before. Of course your appetite is nothing to speak of, and your dinner consequently yields barely enough of nourishment to keep you alive, while the undigested portion of it lays the foundation of destructive complaints.”

Lockart, mindful of his paleness in every looking-glass he met with, again acknowledged that his mistress spoke well.

“ Ha, ha—ha, ha, ha !” laughed the merry octogenarian, amused at her own eloquence. “ You know of old what a bully I am : how I used to blow you up about your coke-stove in the garden, and all that ‘ happing ’ and roasting of your feet which my dear boy Ellis Wilmotte has so often condemned.”

“ Very kind you were, Mrs. Melville, and shamefully self-indulgent I have been. But I have begun to follow Dr. Wilmotte’s advice in exerting myself more, and in applying cold water after fomentations.”

“ And a happy evidence of improvement we have in your most welcome presence among us to-day. Ha, you glance at *my* feet with satire in your eye ! But though often associated with it, gout is not rheumatism. Gout, along with the good constitution in other respects

which so often goes with it, I have from my ancestors ; but the Lockarts are not gouty !”

Angus admitted the fact, as he relieved the old lady of a plate, from which she had just eaten a cake with evident enjoyment, and handed it to a passing attendant.

“ Now, you observed,” Mrs. Melville went on in her briskest manner, “ the gratification I experienced in eating that cake. Even while talking, I gave it a fair share of my attention, and I finished it with a relish which will go a long way towards making my system accept it in a spirit akin to that with which my palate enjoyed it ! The whole frame is put into good tone—the nerves are soothed, the blood flows round in glad-some waves—through sympathy with the pleased sense and the satisfied mind ! It is thus, Sir Angus, that you must ‘ take to ’ your food if you would have health, and experience the pleasurableness of existence in this fair world on which God sheds so much more sunshine than any of us deserve. You expect a great deal from your stomach, and surely bare gratitude, no less than self-interest, should teach you to study its tastes. Instead of heedlessly casting into it whatever is set before you, and that merely to save yourself from absolute hunger or extinction, you ought to consider its humours, and take a lively interest in seeing that everything you eat is thoroughly good of its kind, and cooked in the most perfect and most tender-making manner. Depend upon it, the time will not be wasted. What you eat will nourish and invigorate you, and the exhausted mind, no less than the languid body, will be renewed and quickened into healthier action. To keep the mind for ever on the rack of purely intellectual studies, and

utterly to neglect and forget meanwhile the interests of the body, is to insure the premature enervation and ruin of the mind. To be sound in mind, you must be sound in body, and every part of your mental, moral, and physical nature must have opportunity for fair development. Your hardest study, and deepest thinking, will go for little if you do not alternate them with relaxation and laughter—nay, your very tears will be maudlin and silly if no fountains of joy ever bubble in your heart ; for to cry otherwise than pitifully, you must know how to laugh. Ha, ha, ha ! you sad, sad victim of an old wife's cackle ! Cheer up, my bonny boy. Had we you here for a month, we'd make an entirely new man of you, Sir Angus.”

Lockart, not a little amused, could not but laugh, were it only in sympathy, and even the mirthful groups tucking-in good things near him turned round to remark that the dear old hostess and melancholy Sir Angus Lockart were fully the most hilarious of the party.

The weather was genial. Fleecy cloudlets skimmed athwart the sun, tempering its rays, and the air was at once balmy and fresh.

The dainties having been done ample justice to, Mrs. Melville took up a position more fully overlooking the lawn, and then signalled to a German band stationed beyond it to strike up dance music. Quickly the younger people paired off and made up quadrille sets on the velvet turf.

Mr. Grange, as active as his daughters, led Miss Lushet to the head of the first quadrille ; on his right, at the side, Mary Melville placed herself with her cousin Major Melville, who was enjoying a brief leave

of absence at the Dingle ; on his left, wrinkled Mr. Drycale ranged himself with Mrs. Beagle. Opposite, Mr. Grange had for vis-à-vis Miss Lockart and Frederick Evans.

Mr. Evans, who has hitherto been known to the reader by name only, was a handsome young member of the Scotch bar, of fully six feet two inches in height. His features were straight, his hair dark, his face pale and rather full-fleshed, and his eyes large, blue, and prominent. His studies had not yet wrinkled his brow, and as little did they appear to have damped the natural vivacity of his disposition, for his countenance seemed always brightened by humour, and in his great eyes a prevailing sense of the ludicrousness of something or somebody was constantly apparent. When he spoke it was with a slight lisp, and if he were repeating something some one had said, it was with a half intentional imitation of that person's voice, which the little peculiarity of his own utterance made irresistibly comical. There was, perhaps, a touch of effeminacy in the smoothness of his face, and a degree of boyishness in the rambling and goggling habit of his eyes, but his ability was considerable, and if he did not argue closely or learnedly at the bar, he, at least, skilfully threw into his recital of the driest details so much of his constitutional drollery, that he speedily won the sympathies of his hearers, and probably, for the moment, turned his adversary's case into ridicule. Even the tranquil audacity of Mr. Brazenlute was not invariably equal to an encounter with Mr. Evans' fun, and a word or two whispered audibly by the younger counsel would occasionally give such a curious aspect to the coolest statement of his distinguished opponent, that bench and bar

would almost lose the thread of the argument in a burst of irrepressible mirth.

Between Mr. Evans' face and his figure there existed a striking harmony of expression—a rich and spontaneous joyousness of temperament was radiant in the former, and in the latter a certain lavishness of outline combined with an admirable proportionateness of all the parts showed that the man's physique was as healthy and genial as his mind. He always wore French trousers with slit-pockets, and it was pleasant to see the easy deliberation with which he was wont to move, with his fingers in the latter, slowly across the squares and diamonds of the inlaid oak floor upon which counsel and agent relax their study-stiffened limbs under the awfully impending roof of the Parliament House.

Men have no idea, by-the-bye, till they try them, of the tranquillizing effect of those slit-pockets upon even the most nervous and bashful dispositions. It is a serious thing for a fledgling barrister without a case, and so without the moral support of a bundle of papers in his hand, to attempt a promenade about the Parliament House for the first time alone, and to do it with the hands hanging disengaged by the side, may be supposed well-nigh impracticable for any but the bravest or most callous. But give a man French trousers, and liberty to keep his hands in their pockets, and his whole nature undergoes a change. Instinctively his hands slip into the side-slits, and he feels on good terms with the world forthwith. Shamefaced and diffident, he becomes confident and cool. A sense of general well-being pervades his frame, and looking around him with calm assurance, he moves composed and easy among the crowd of wigged and gowned, where, but the day

before, in less accommodating garments, he felt himself an awkward and embarrassed intruder. Perhaps we should not exaggerate in asserting that were a regiment of His Majesty the Emperor of the French's troops of the line to be turned out some morning in English tights their whole bearing would be altered, and that from easy, devil-may-care, pleasant little fellows chattering in chance groups about the *caserne* yard, they would be found to have suddenly become staid and loutish young men, not fond of looking each other in the face, and conscious chiefly of being wretchedly at a loss what to do with their idle hands. Nay, it may be believed that were the experiment persisted in, not only the bearing but the habits and characters of the men would be rapidly changed, and their loyalty affected. On the other hand, were a corresponding alteration to be made on the dress of a British regiment, is it easy to conceive what would be the astonishment of a martinet colonel in passing through the barracks shortly thereafter? That subordination had been cast to the winds, and that the privates were about to elect new officers by ballot, would be his least alarming impression. When, then, a barrister, naturally so nonchalant as Fred Evans, indulges in slit side-pockets the result may readily be imagined; and truly it was, as I have hinted, worth while to see Mr. Evans as, in a compact wig of grey horse-hair effectively surmounting a handsome face which no vestige of beard or whisker was ever permitted to deform, and in a long gown which materially added to his apparent height, he came floating over the boards with his hands carelessly dropped into his side-slits, and on his lips a smile half genial and half satiric, by which the most overbearing of his professional

seniors was likely to be warned. But, of course, Mr. Evans was not such a boor as to make use of his slits while dancing, and it was therefore entirely to the natural self-possession of the man that we must attribute the tranquil grace which distinguished all his movements, as, with finely blended negligence and precision, he now went through the figures of the quadrille with his no less easy and no less graceful partner, Edith Lockart.

From the next set, Archer Calvert, dancing with Miss Grange, glanced now and then a little anxiously at the striking couple, and, probably, not without recalling the mortification he had experienced when, not many months before, and in pretty nearly the same company, his wounded ankle had obliged him to resign Edith to the lofty young pleader immediately after his first and never-to-be-forgotten quadrille with her. But no doubt it was now a comfort to him to remember that he had secured her hand for the first round dance, and, decidedly to carry out his agreement with her touching their bearing in the presence of Miss Lushet, for every other besides; and thus, though his attention a little wandered, he was far from feeling anxious enough to be at all neglectful of his present pretty partner.

That Miss Grange was a pretty partner, he, mindful of Ellis Wilmotte's melancholy state of mind, anew satisfied himself by frequent glances; and that she was also pleasant and conversable he speedily became well assured, for Marian, doubting not his affection for her dear friend Edith, exerted herself unwontedly to entertain and please him. Pretty, and agreeably intelligent, however, as she most certainly was, he tried in vain to discern what there was in her beauty or her wit to awe a man

like his friend. In what consisted that matchlessness which made Wilmotte believe that it was enough for Angus Lockart to know her thenceforth to love and covet her, he, for his part, felt quite at a loss to determine. It struck him that Lockart was likely to be acquainted with many girls scarcely if at all less attractive, and that, on the other hand, a radically good fellow, such as he believed the Doctor to be, had probably as good a claim to, and, therefore, he argued, chance of winning such a girl's warmest affections as any man alive. Making such observations as he conversed gaily with the subject of them, Archer, with his usual airy step, kept accurate time to the well-marked tune, which a slight breeze from the west wafted over the bowling-green.

Opposite him, Wilmotte, with a look of even cheerful resignation, danced with Sarah, the elder Miss Melville, a good sort of serious girl, who in no respect resembled her versatile little sister.

In the same set were Eagle and Polly Grange, partners, and both apparently exceedingly well pleased to be so. Mr. Eagle seemed more than usually attentive to Polly. The warm-hearted and unaffected girl had perhaps begun really to interest him. Mary Melville was near enough to see how Polly's colour, or that portion of it which was not burnt into her cheeks, went and came, and how her eyes sparkled whenever her partner bent his noble head to address her. Mary liked her cousin, young Major Melville, but while she chatted to him freely between the figures of the quadrille, her thoughts were chiefly engaged about Polly and the bright-haired divine, who, by-the-bye, dressed in checked trousers and a black necktie, had nothing very clerical

in his appearance to-day. Polly's devotion to Mr. Eagle had been obvious to Mary for some time, but hardly had she thought him likely to reciprocate the feeling. A gentle and almost anxious courtesy in his manner was, however, now too apparent to be overlooked, and Mary experienced a little qualm of jealousy in observing it. But this was for just a moment. Mr. Eagle had, after all, but little wounded her, and besides, warm and romantic generosity had so deep a root in Mary's nature, that a species of pity she felt for her not very brilliantly endowed cousin was almost alone sufficient to make her think of withdrawing her own pretensions to the first place in the unconventional divine's affections. She would put him to some test, she presently resolved. If he really cared little for herself, and was therefore, it might be presumed, already somewhat attached to Polly, it would be both silly and wrong to weave the pretty web in which she had at one time thought of taking him ; and, in sooth, could it at any time have been worth her while to captivate a man who had so little taste as to dance first, from preference, with Polly Grange ? The golden head tossed, and its curls glittered in the sun.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE quadrille over, soon the younger dancers, to a sprightly waltz tune, began to whirl round the spacious lawn.

Archer lost no time in securing Miss Lockart, and perhaps he revengefully enjoyed Fred Evans' visible disappointment at finding his quadrille partner already engaged for the waltz.

I need not say that Edith looked fully better matched with Archer than she had done with Mr. Evans, who, while equalling her in ease of manner, somewhat lacked that perfect refinement which peculiarly distinguished the slight artilleryman. Evans was not, indeed, coarse or ungentlemanlike, but in looking at him one had a consciousness of the fleshiness of his person, so to speak ; whereas, in looking at Calvert, his person went for little in your sight, and the chaste spirit shining in his sensitive face and clear eyes chiefly attracted your attention. Similar to your impression on seeing Calvert, was that you experienced in looking at Edith. Her gracefulness and air of exquisite delicacy struck you before you thought of her beauty. Seeing Edith and Archer together, one felt as when hearing two notes which differ, and yet perfectly accord ; and it seemed to one that should time unite them permanently, it would

do that which nature had pre-arranged. Alas that nature, knowing thus how to cast men and women in diverse yet kindred moulds, should so often, apparently at least, leave her perfect pairs adrift upon the waves of time, to meet or separate as chance may set them at last in meeting or parting currents! Or is nothing really left to chance?

Miss Lockart was now dressed as when we first met her beside the Beechworth dovecot—a purple jacket of summer silk over a purple and white checked dress, with just the right allowance of crinoline; for this fair girl, who would have looked well in anything, cared much more to look graceful than to be fashionable. She wore, too, her pretty Leghorn hat, with the identical white feather to which Archer's attention had been particularly drawn by Marian's caressing fingers while he sat on the cliff reading from it, and not a little accurately, as it turned out, the language of gesture and expression. Calvert, as usual, was in tweeds, and wore, also as usual, dim kid boots, which, from their softness, gave a free play to the muscles of the feet and ankle that rendered them well adapted for lawn-dancing. Fortunately, his injured ankle had quite ceased to pain him, and so with perfect freedom he could spin about the green, where it need hardly be said he guided his sweet partner among the whirling couples with admirable tact, and relished his dance exceedingly.

Mr. Evans, after looking about him for a while, and casting a critical eye upon every disengaged girl, seemed at last to fix his attention upon Miss Bracy Lushet, who, still leaning on Ashcroft's arm, stood on the terrace viewing the ground, or, to speak more accurately, following through all the mazes the graceful pair whom we

have just described. Archer talked to his partner even while going at the briskest pace, and Miss Lushet had now every opportunity of noticing the unreservedness and earnestness with which he played the part regarding which he had come to an understanding with Miss Lockart the day before.

Perseveringly Bracy's large brown eyes followed him, studying his open countenance, which it was always pretty easy to read, and marking the impression his words seemed to produce upon Edith, who, mindful of her bargain, conscientiously allowed herself, as after the Ashcroft breakfast, to appear sufficiently pleased and happy to sting any rival to the quick.

This Edith felt no scruple in doing—holding, as she did, that a girl like Bracy was quite able to look after her own fortunes, and that any fancy she might have for Calvert was perfectly preposterous; an idea which she had adopted very readily when it was suggested to her by the latter, though perhaps it might not have occurred to herself.

It is difficult to say what effect appeared to be produced upon Miss Bracy by what she saw. Her eyes sometimes dilated and sometimes narrowed; now and then she smiled, and now and then her lips were very grave. Mr. Evans observed the interest with which she watched the dance, but he did not turn to see if one person appeared to engage her attention more than another. He seemed to be debating some point in his mind, and stood on the edge of the green with a wavering air. At last his mind was evidently made up, and, at his usual deliberate pace, he advanced directly to Miss Lushet, and, with rather marked formality, requested the honour—not the pleasure—of being allowed

to dance with her. The stately girl bowed to Mr. Grange, and took Evans' arm with an air of scarcely less patronage, tall as he was, than that with which she was wont to favour Captain Calvert.

Sharp Mary Melville had, we know, guessed that if Calvert withdrew his attentions to Bracy, Fred Evans would be eager to replace him, and now, while whirling round the lawn with Mr. Eagle (with whom she was dancing *pro tem.* merely, his proper partner, Polly, having had to go into the house to change a burst shoe), her eyes twinkled knowingly as she observed the handsome pair coming down the terrace steps.

Certainly Evans did look rather deeply impressed with his good fortune in securing such a partner, and was by no means so *dégradé* in his manner as usual. Miss Lushet seemed only a moderate-sized woman beside his six-feet-two, but she lost none of her superb air at his side, and it very soon occurred to Mary Melville that she condescended to him quite crushingly. Indeed, the bland sweetness of her manner had always a subduing effect, and perhaps none of her friends save Angus Lockart knew how to accept the compliment implied in it, and at the same time to put aside its usual humiliating influence. Evans apparently had not this knowledge, or was awed by the lady's charms. He looked, in truth, comparatively meek beside his beautiful partner, and the spirit of drollery which so generally possessed him seemed quite gone while, speaking only a word or two now and then, they rounded the lawn together,—outwardly a very noble-looking and harmoniously matched couple; outwardly, in fact, another of nature's pairs. As such, indeed, Mary was smilingly regarding them, and, at the same time, admiring her

own prescient insight into Evans' feelings, when, lo, after only a few circuits of the ground, they paused, exchanged some conventional courtesies seemingly, and then retired to the terrace, where Bracy took a seat, and, turning to Mrs. Melville, appeared wholly to forget her partner. Mr. Evans, after a moment, walked away with rather a relieved expression of face, and quickly recovering his wonted vivacity, invited a small and comely young lady in blue to dance the remainder of the waltz. "So much for natural selection!" thought disappointed Mary, disdainfully tossing up her dainty nose at all the Darwins. "They don't get on at all; but it's certainly Bracy's fault. Evans is miserable about her. He's devoted to her. I think so still, though, to be sure, he did look pleased to be quit of her, even with a snubbing! Fool he was to invite her to dance if he didn't feel able to hold his own with her!"

The briefness of Evans' dance was remarked also by Archer and Edith. Honest Archer, only too anxious that any one should set up a claim to Bracy, exulted when he saw her led off by the handsome youth of whom he had, in fact, been jealous ere he had dared to form hopes of Edith, and while Miss Lushet's friendship was valuable to him. That Evans should now take Bracy off his hand, and so leave him free to win Edith, seemed to him the thing of all others to be desired.

Perhaps Miss Lockart experienced a corresponding wish; but, alas, what meant this evident want of harmony between Evans and Bracy, who were apparently so perfectly suited to each other? Why did Evans look abashed, and for once, almost awkward? and why did Miss Lushet thus suddenly intimate her wish to sit

down, and then turn her back upon her partner? Did she indeed care only for Archer Calvert, and did she disdain to win him back by a revengeful pretence of preference for another? Bracy was naturally affectionate, Edith believed, and thinking of that, a little pang of compunction may have quavered in the latter's gentle heart.

"You must dance with Miss Lushet," said Edith suddenly, and, perhaps, not without an effort.

Archer stopped, and almost immediately the music also stopped.

"Do you think so; why? Wouldn't that spoil our plan?"

"I think Miss Lushet may be vexed if you don't. We didn't agree that you were to slight her. The next is the Lancers. After them there will be—"

"Our second waltz, Miss Lockart. Pray do not forget me. I will obey you now, and at least ask Miss Lushet for the Lancers."

Young Lemon Melville was near him, and, overhearing his last words, begged the favour of Edith's hand for the next dance. She went off with the Major at once, and Archer, with a somewhat embarrassed and contrite air, made his way to Miss Bracy's seat.—Had she not held out to him the prospect of a dance with her, and would not she gratify him by dancing the Lancers? the blushing humbug said, with his best bow.—She had been waiting impatiently till he should invite her, replied the bland lady, with engaging and flattering candour.—"Feared that," sighed the luckless youth, offering his arm, "she isn't a bit cured!"

The sets of Lancers were quickly arranged. Major Melville and Edith were opposite Calvert and his queenly partner. Wilmotte, who had been waltzing

with Marian, led Mary Melville to the right side, and Mr. Eagle and Marian stood at the left. The other octaves on the lawn do not so much interest us, graceful as many of the county ladies were, and handsome their attentive partners."

"You seemed to enjoy being with that lovely girl?" said Miss Lushet, smiling kindly on Archer.

Before he could answer, the setting at the corners began; and when, at length, there was a pause, he had not yet determined what he ought to say.

"I have a great regard for her, though I am not intimate with her as yet," the rich voice resumed.

Calvert made a sort of inclination in acknowledgment, and his keen eyes twinkled inquisitively, if a little timidly, on her face.

"You had a long ramble with her after breakfast yesterday, and you paid her much attention during luncheon in the hay-field," she went on quietly.

Her words might seem to complain of his neglect of herself, but the tone of her voice was as sweet and steady as ever. The Lancers do not leave much time for conversation, and again Archer had not an immediate opportunity of replying. When an interval came, Miss Lushet was still the first speaker.

"I greatly enjoyed seeing you waltz together," she said.

"Does she speak ironically?" Calvert asked himself. Then he screwed up his courage and said,—

"She suited me capitally. I do think her a very sweet girl, and very lovely, as you say."

"There, that ought to tell!" he thought, a little nervously glancing up at his partner's large eyes. But immediately his turn came to move, for he had been dilatory in answering his companion's brief remark.

"Do you dance again with her?" the lady inquired at the next quiet moment, as she concentrated her gaze upon Calvert's eyes, and made her dark brows level by drawing them together.

That levelling of the eyebrows till they formed almost a straight line across her face, always impressed Archer, reminding him, as it did, that she was not all softness. "She dares me to say that I mean to dance with Edith again, after devoting so much time to her yesterday, and to-day already," thought he with rising courage; for it was not against the lady's hardness that he had a difficulty in holding his own, but against that gentle lovingness of demeanour which touched his kindly heart.

"Yes; we are engaged—for all the waltzes," he said, as quietly as he could, while seeking his place in the dance.

Bracy did not speak again immediately, and Calvert had time to glance more than once in her face before the chain figure began. Her brows had flown up, rounding to their highest arch, and a glow of keen interest illuminated the rich brown eyes. Then the dance was resumed, and Archer was gaily touching the hands of his other fair friends as he met them in the chain circle. When for a moment face to face with his partner, her expression had become grave, and he noticed that in trying to smile upon him her lips seemed to quiver, as if some other expression would be more natural to them under the circumstances. Calvert's soft heart melted at the sight: "Ah," thought he, "she wishes to put the best face on it, and to smile, as if rather glad that I prefer Edith; but with all her calmness she can't manage it. Dear, tender soul! what a shame to wound it!"

But the continuous movement of the dance left no one time for more than a passing word, and Archer did not attempt to say anything, until he offered Bracy his arm to lead her back to the terrace.

"I believe there will be only a very few more dances, and then those who like will range over the grounds," he remarked, kindly trying to diminish the importance of his announcement that he had secured Edith Lockart for all the waltzes.

"In such an afternoon we shall enjoy that," replied Miss Lushet, alluding to ranging the grounds.

"And you—?" she went on, with her great eyes caressing him.

"Hope Miss Lushet will indulge her old friend with her company," he said with more gallantry than truthfulness, but feeling that he was doing a generous thing.

"It would grieve me to be a tax upon you, Captain Calvert. I should be glad to walk with you, but I shall be even more content to see you with Miss Edith, who is so 'sweet and lovely!' I shall not want you again, believe me, dear Archer."

This language might be considered very cutting, but again no corresponding bitterness or hardness in the lady's voice, nor any anger in her face, indicated to our somewhat perplexed friend that his attentions to Miss Lockart were really mortifying to Bracy.

"Thank you," he said, bowing to take leave when his partner was seated.

"Well, this is rather a joke," he mused as he loitered along the back of the terrace alone to ponder what had occurred. "She's actually given me leave to flirt with Miss Lockart for the rest of the day! Says it will please her to see me so innocently occupied! Won't be

a bit jealous, sweet and lovely as I may think Edith. What a beast I am ! I really don't believe she spoke sarcastically, such true and confiding affection was in her loving eyes. She can trust me ! Weary day ! Ah, there stands Miss Lockart looking out for me. I'll tell her everything. Won't I ? Nothing like taking advice !" So off he went to where Edith was waiting for her waltz partner on Lemon Melville's arm.

CHAPTER XLV.

MILDNESS was Mr. Melville's most marked characteristic. Even at the bar he had been remarkable for it, and on the bench the considerate urbanity of his manners, especially when inexperienced counsel were before him, had won for him the gratitude of the profession. He was a noble-looking man : tall and straight, yet with just enough of stoop in his figure to save it from stiffness, and to impart grace and ease to his bearing. His hair was now perfectly white, and he looked more venerable than his aged mother, so many traces had hard study and sickness left upon his handsome face. He had retired from the bench, and thus lost his title of Lord Dingleheath, at a comparatively early age, and now he spent the evening of his days in a sort of industrious leisure, studying a little, thinking much, and doing kindnesses to all who came within his reach.

He had not come forth from the retirement of his library to welcome his mother's guests on their arrival, but when dancing fairly set in for the afternoon on the bowling-green, he joined those on the terrace, and shook hands with the various couples as from time to time they returned from the dancing ground.

"So at length you have ventured among our young people," he said, addressing Lockart, who was reclin-

ing in his own chair beside one of the drawing-room tables, which had been placed near the south end of the terrace.

"Yes," replied Angus, "but a lame man is rather at a discount in a dancing party. However, I enjoy looking on, and but little regret that I can do nothing more as yet."

"As yet," murmured the ex-judge, smiling; "so when your feet are better you mean to dance again?"

Angus coloured a little.

"Nay, I don't see why you shouldn't," added Mr. Melville gently.

"Considering that I have a son not very far from six years old, and that had fortune and health favoured me I should hardly have been thinking of dancing with boys and girls now, you may well wonder, Mr. Melville, at my remark."

"Pardon me, Lockart, I was thoughtless. Nothing in the circumstances is more natural than your inclination to be youthful again for a while. I sincerely trust that happier years than these few last are before you. What a pretty scene it is! My girls have certainly brought together some very nice groups. They are now at the Lancers, if I mistake not."

"They are; and little time seems to be allowed for conversation. They are hardly a moment at rest. The figures of the dance are pretty though, and I daresay the younger sort at least like the perpetual motion."

"My little Mary seems to enjoy it, as she does every kind of sport."

"This is her portrait, is it not?" asked Lockart, who had opened a photograph album.

"It is; and, of course, an unpleasing likeness. She

is not a good subject : the sun having, it would seem, a prejudice against golden hair and light eyes. You see her bright eyes are lost, and her pretty hair, of which I am so proud, is quite dingy."

"This one of her cousin is better."

"Ah, yes ; Marian is well caught. Her eyes, though of the blue or grey rather than the brown division, are dark, and her hair of that brown shade which always comes out very fairly."

"There is character in your niece's face—more than is usual in the portraits of young people."

"Perhaps, Lockart, it is not the fault of the sun that its portraits of young people, girls especially, are often blanks. Marian is rather a pet of mine, and I am glad you also see something in her. I have long talks with her at times, and she pleases me by really seeming to enter with interest into subjects which my own Mary pouts at still. The next portrait is Miss Lushet's. It startled me when I saw it first, as I had not observed in her face the expression of so much firmness or force of will as you may see there in the eyebrows and the forehead. The photographer is a great detector of character. One may know persons for years without suspecting some peculiarity of disposition which will be seen at a glance in their likenesses as caught in the camera. Persons who are conscious of being rogues should not heedlessly exhibit their photographs. But no doubt it is occasionally the finer traits of character which are fixed on the paper for our study, and we may see traces of worth or vigour for the first time in the portraits of our acquaintances. Fixed on paper for our study, I say, and certainly it is curious that persons who would get out of patience if they fancied you were

staring curiously at them, will complacently allow you an opportunity of deliberately ‘studying’ their photographed countenances through a magnifying glass. Perhaps they innocently suppose that they were able to take good care that it should be only their company expression that the sun was allowed to see and print.”

“ You are alarmingly sarcastic, Mr. Melville. But it seems you have allowed your own portrait to be inserted here.”

“ Yes, I have, and rashly enough, for it is somewhat treacherous. Indeed, I may say that I knew myself better after it was taken than I did before. There is an indication in the eyes and mouth which I confess surprised me. On thinking it over, I felt sure that it revealed something in my character which I had not suspected it to possess, and which, as far as I knew, my friends even had happily not observed.”

“ Ah, I’m not sure that I see it, unless it be a touch of that somewhat cynical humour which your remarks betray, and for which you have not been, I think, notorious, sir.”

“ Far from notorious, and indeed I so often saw myself spoken of by the press as the mildest of mortal judges, that, taking the flattering unction to my soul, I fairly came to think charity my chief characteristic, but,—you will pardon my shameful egotism,—when I saw my photograph, immediately I knew that in heart I was censorious and severe.”

“ Ha, ha, you dear papa !” cried Mary, who had come up behind, leaning on Wilmotte’s arm, “ that’s a good joke ; you didn’t know that you were a severe censor of your dearest neighbours until I got your portrait done ! Well, I only hope that now you know what a dreadful

critic and tyrant you are, you will try and become a little less hard upon us."

She slipped her hand over the old gentleman's arm as she spoke, and looked up so lovingly in his face that he could not but kiss her fair forehead, and feel how little was needed to melt his gentle heart.

"Censorious and severe," thought Lockart, as he smiled upon the father and child. "Certainly his favourite art has rather misled him in this instance."

"Ah, Miss Grange," he said aloud, "as Mr. Eagle led Marian to the terrace after the Lancers, "I have been consoling myself with your portrait during your absence. I cannot, I lament, ask leave to dance that waltz with you, but when you happen to be tired of dancing, perhaps the invalid may be favoured with your company for a little."

Marian left Mr. Eagle's arm, and looked quite ready to seat herself beside the lame man forthwith, but she had not had time to do so when Ellis Wilmotte quietly interposed.

"Forgive me," he said, "if I remind you, Miss Grange, that you promised me this waltz also."

His eyes were fixed upon her as he spoke, and he saw a slight shade pass over her face as she placed her hand upon his arm. "Ah," he thought, "she is disappointed at being taken from Sir Angus, and the fact that it is I who take her does not reconcile her to leaving him. Could I wish for a clearer proof of my failure? I will detain her for but a minute or two."

Lockart also had his eyes upon her, and seeing the shade, felt flattered and reassured by it.

"Well, Miss Grange, when the dancing is over and the ramble begins, may I hope to fall in with you?"

"I shall be happy to join you, Sir Angus, as soon as—"

"As soon as—?" repeated Wilmotte, with ever so little bitterness in his tone.

"As I am quite worn out with dancing," answered Marian with spirit, as she stepped off with an arch look which became her, though almost new to her face.

"Two or three rounds must content me," said her partner.

"That I may return to Sir Angus?" asked she.

"Of whom I confess myself jealous," replied Ellis, suddenly determining, in a sort of desperation, to come to the point.

"Jealous, dear Ellis," said Marian quickly, "what an idea, as if you were not my oldest and most tried friend! Why, you know I respect you more than any one except my father. Though I think it pleasant to talk with Sir Angus, who is new to me, it does give me pleasure to dance with you as much as you please. I shouldn't like to be so ungrateful as not to feel always glad to please you, who have always been so good to me and Polly that it is impossible for me not to love you very much, almost as much, indeed, as if you were really and truly our brother. I say so, dear Ellis, because I have observed now and then of late that you have seemed a little hurt at things I have said or done."

"I do not believe you ever dreamt of paining me or anybody else, dear Marian, and I shall not willingly lose the indulgent affection you have shown me by idle touchiness. Let us dance; that's a capital tune."

Thus was Wilmotte's fate sealed to all appearance; and surely we must admire the kindly tact with which Miss Marian spared him the humiliation of a direct

refusal. Perfectly she now understood his feelings, and correctly she guessed with how much humility he had quietly loved her. Both touched her deeply, and no vanity interfered with her anxious desire to make the truth regarding her own feelings known to him in the least mortifying and least painful way.

Ellis half suspected that his partner thus read his heart, and generously tried to spare him, and he was grateful, even while feeling that every proof of her good-heartedness must embitter his lot.

Round and round they went. In a little he proposed to lead her back to the terrace, but she resisted, and seemed bent upon going on till the music ceased. More and more suspecting the meaning of her speech, Ellis saw that it would now be kind to dance with her to the end, in order that she might have the consolation of feeling that she had done something to gratify him.

They span round as steadily as need be, but they were probably too much occupied in thinking to observe whither they span, for presently Wilmotte's shoulder struck Mr. Eagle's side, and over rolled the tall divine upon his little partner, Mary Melville. Several couples were so close behind Wilmotte that hardly was he arrested by the concussion with Eagle than he and Marian were pushed forward and tumbled over the prostrate pair before them. Mary was undermost, and screamed with delight when Marian was crushed down upon her, but presently she ceased laughing, and moaned piteously while Eagle was trying to assist her to rise. Then, just as all the others had got to their feet, she was silent and still. The party were in consternation, and yielded place to Dr. Wilnotte, who immedi-

ately had her wrist in his hand. For a few seconds she lay as if lifeless in Mr. Eagle's arms, and then her eyes opened suddenly in that gentleman's face with a searching glance. A single look seemed to satisfy her, for immediately she jumped to her feet laughing and shaking her curls roguishly at the Doctor. Her friends laughed too, and the band, which had paused, striking up again, the dance was resumed with spirit.

"I know all about it for certain now," said Miss Mary to her own heart as she whirled away with Mr. Eagle. "This dear divine doesn't care a pin for me; that is, in the lover-sort-of-way. He was looking as anxious and sorry as I could wish my best friends to do when I am ill, but there was no acute agony in his eye. Trust me, little heart, I know the difference. The good man likes me well enough, but he hasn't thought of taking *you* captive, oh, my best beloved!" And thereupon the lady smiled at her own wit, and felt greatly entertained at the success of her innocent ruse, and wonderfully little mortified by her discovery that she, in truth, was not all in all to the lofty Eagle. "Now, Polly's safe," she added, still inaudibly, "safe from me at least, and I'm sure I'll be glad to help her, poor dear."

"I'm happy you weren't hurt, Miss Mary," said her partner, who had, however, but little breath to spare while waltzing—for though he waltzed when an opportunity offered, he did not often attend dancing parties, and so had not had much practice in whirling round on either floors or lawns.

"Aren't you?" replied Mary archly. "Do you know, I fainted expressly on purpose to see exactly how sorry you would be at seeing me hurt?"

"Oh, then, I hope I did happen to look very much distressed," replied Eagle, who was not without a sense of humour.

"Yes, you looked very anxious, and I was quite satisfied, and had my mind set at rest. You're very fond of me?"

"Indeed I am."

"I have long suspected as much, but never could get you to say it; I'm so artless. The idea of getting myself knocked over with you was quite an inspiration that came to me in a critical moment."

"How! did you manœuvre to bring us against the Doctor! I fancied, indeed, that you were not yielding to my guidance as before."

"Yes; I saw that Dr. Wilmotte didn't see where he was going, and so I contrived to get you in front of him. It was a good dodge, wasn't it, now? The turf is so soft, you see, that one does not mind having a tumble on it. And then, to know that you are very fond of me! It was worth any trouble to ascertain that from your own eyes and lips! Trust me, Mr. Eagle, I shall always keep a nice corner for you in the warmest side of my heart, and will look in at the image of you there whenever I feel low-spirited. It is so cheering to recall the love of absent friends!"

The flattered minister laughed, and hadn't breath to do more till Mary was pleased to indicate that they had better stop. When they did stop, it was beside Polly and Major Melville.

"Oh, Lemon, I haven't had a round dance with you yet," cried Mary to her cousin. "Let's change partners. Here's Mr. Eagle for you, Polly dear."

The exchange was effected at once, and Mary span

away with her hand on the young officer's shoulder, delighted with the fun and her own generosity.

Meanwhile, Wilmotte and Marian had continued their dance, with lighter hearts than before,—the excitement of the fall having enlivened their intercourse by giving them something to laugh at.

When the music ceased, they returned gaily enough to the terrace, and Wilmotte apologized with so much cheerfulness to Sir Angus, that the latter, though he had been a spectator of the amusing catastrophe on the green, felt a momentary dread that the Doctor must have been successfully prosecuting the suit of which he had for a day or two suspected him.

In truth, it is possible that Wilmotte felt relieved, and it is certain that he addressed the first person he met with a good deal of unaffected hilarity, and then went about among the crowd on the terrace, chatting to his friends with an unruffled brow.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"'TIS as I feared, dear Ellis ; you've let the tide go by, and now your last chance has ebbed away," whispered Mary Melville, lightly laying her hand on Wilmotte's arm, as he strolled from the terrace with a group of guests when the dancing was over.

He looked round inquiringly, and put his hand over hers to keep her at his side.

"Come with me, and I'll show you what I saw a minute ago, when walking with my cousin Lemon," she added, indicating with her disengaged hand the direction in which she proposed to lead him.

They parted from the group, and walked through an old larch plantation, near the farther side of which Mary soon paused, and bade Wilmotte look across a small field of yellow barley. Just a little beyond the field he saw Miss Grange sitting on the low, almost horizontal trunk of a tree which lay across the Dingle "Burn," and near her, in his chair, Sir Angus Lockart. Wilmotte looked at them for some time fixedly. He observed that they were talking with animation, and though they were above a hundred yards off, he could see that they were entirely occupied about each other, or the subjects on which they conversed, and paid no attention to the landscape or the other guests who occasionally passed not

far from them. Presently Wilmotte turned away with a suppressed sigh, and looked for Mary, who had left him. She was busy gathering fern fronds under the trees, and he joined her in silence.

"There are nicer ones upon that bank," said Mary, indicating a broken hillock in the wood.

She led the way, and foliage soon concealed the Dingle Burn and Marian's tree from their view.

"Here is stag-horn moss," said Wilmotte, stopping on a mound which commanded a view over some fallen pines.

"Oh, then, I shall have a wreath, if you will help me to make one," cried Mary, coming to the spot and throwing herself on the grass.

Wilmotte followed her example, and sat down where the moss was thickest.

"To what a size it grows!" exclaimed Mary, drawing from the grass a moss branch of two or three feet in length, and studded with clubs.

She took off her hat, and offering the branch to her companion, asked him to wind it round her brow. The vivacity Wilmotte showed on the terrace immediately after handing Marian over to Sir Angus, had now given place to a grave expression, but after a pause, in which he seemed hardly to take in the meaning of Mary's words, he somewhat hurriedly took the moss from her hand, and, with a slowly brightening smile, wound it round her fair head.

Meanwhile, her fingers plucked up other strings of moss, which in turn she handed to him. In a few minutes he had made her a very pretty wreath, to which he presently added a nodding plume of fern fronds. The green of the moss and ferns made her yellow hair

look brighter than ever, and the plume gave additional piquancy to her expression.

Wilmotte gazed at her admiringly, and confessed to himself that it was pleasant to sit beside such a nice-looking girl. Gradually he grew cheerful again, and began to forget what he had seen beyond the barley-field. A cloud which had been lingering over the sun passed away, and the spines of the larch trees sparkled in the freed rays.

By-and-by Mary glanced at Wilmotte's face frankly, and, seeing that he was looking cheerful, remarked,—

“So you are not very much cut up about it after all? I'm very glad.”

A little startled, he turned away his face; but it was averted for only a second or two, and then he looked round upon his fair friend and said,—

“I don't reject your sympathy, Mary. I have lost what I greatly coveted, and I think it a sad loss.”

“Yet I see that you are more yourself than you have sometimes appeared,” said Mary. “I once was afraid that you would mope like a sentimental simpleton; but you are not going to make a fool of yourself. Ellis, dear, I can be as serious as you like. I think Marian in every way deserving of you, and I know that in missing the chance you had of her you are right in thinking that you have, indeed, lost a great deal. I am sorry for you, and will condole with you as much as you please, provided you speak cheerfully. She is so gentle and intelligent, and pretty and good, that I always approved of your suit, but now that I see how little impression you made upon her, I think it happy for you that something has occurred to open your eyes to the truth, and so to set you free from a profitless

bondage. It's a pity you can't get Marian, and it's a good thing for you to know that you cannot. Isn't it now?"

"It is so, Mary; and the truth is, I have generally had so little hope of success that my devotion to your dear little cousin has been, as you say, a bondage. I have long been wretched through hope deferred and vain desire, and when, a little while ago, I gathered from something that Marian said to me that beyond all question my lingering hopes were foolish, I experienced such a reaction of feeling that for a time I was positively in high spirits. There was just a parting pang, and then I felt relieved and free. Without liking Miss Grange less than I did, I believe that I shall be able contentedly to see Sir Angus more than fill my place."

"Then the little monkey really refused you?" said Mary, unable to conceal her curiosity.

"I didn't ask her; but she said something, perhaps intentionally, that sufficiently indicated that my hopes were vain. I was well prepared, fortunately, and so the immediate effect of what she said was to deliver me from a weight of anxiety."

"To put you out of pain, in short, by a kill-or-cure remedy. Well, I'm thankful it proved the latter. Now, I'll tell you what, Ellis, as you are confessedly not fit to make love for yourself, just let me advise you to consult me as soon as you fancy another girl. You never would follow my prompting when I showed you how to deal with Mar, and you see what has come of your wilfulness. You'll have more faith in me next time, and come better speed."

Wilmotte's devotion to Marian had, indeed, been bur-

thensome to him. So diffidently had he shrunk from confessing it even in his manner, so rarely had his soul been comforted by faith in himself, that he had been living in a state of continual "worry," and now, even at the cost of all he had ever desired, there was for him not a little comfort in that release from wearisome longings which Marian's verdict conferred. He did not under-estimate his misfortune, but he had so mourned it by anticipation, that when the decisive wrench came his spirit survived it, and at heart he was very much less downcast than Mary supposed, and less unable to give way at once to a new "impression" than she could have imagined him. Her own delicate beauty, in fact, now again touched his wrung heart, as it had touched it in the hay-field the day before, and, without fancying for an instant that he might find solace from his wounds in loving her in particular, he, let it be confessed at least, acknowledged to himself that in some such bright face as hers it might become to him infinitely soothing to gaze.

"Well, I promise to consult you, Miss Mary, as soon as I fall in love with a suitable damsel."

"Oh, what a miserable pun—*suitable!* I'm ashamed of you."

"I did not mean it."

"No, I should think not, Ellis; but you'd be all the better of a little more love of fun, let me tell you. I should feel awfully bored if such a solemn man were to court me."

"By-the-bye," exclaimed Ellis suddenly, as if a new thought had struck him, "what if I in fact were to fancy you, my pretty Mary?"

"I should like it of all things," cried Mary, laughing,

and tickling the Doctor's eyelids with the tip of a fern leaf. "I told you, just a few days ago, what good fun I thought it would be to have you at my mercy, and how much I'd like to worry you."

Ellis caught up her hand and patted it between his. For several seconds he sat silent, glancing at her bright head, and gazing into her lively eyes, which mirthfully twinkled upon him.

"Had I but thought of it in time!" he said almost with a sigh, and with a wistful look.

"Ha, ha, it isn't a bit too late, Ellis; and now that Mr. Eagle has refused me, I don't see why I shouldn't take up with some other."

Wilmotte's countenance fell. He had for the moment forgotten Eagle, whom he had been wont to consider partial to Mary. Then he wondered what she meant by saying that Mr. Eagle had refused her.

"Haven't you observed that Mr. Eagle has gone over wholly to my cousin Polly?" she said by way of explanation.

Ellis grasped her pretty fingers.

"So ho!" he said, "you, too, have met with a disappointment, and it was a bleeding heart that comforted mine!"

The owner of the bleeding heart looked in his face radiantly.

"How clever you are to-day!" she said. "I've hopes of you, Ellis. Think of 'old glummy' making such a neat little speech!"

"Mary, dear!"

"Well, sir?"

"What if my love for Marian was after all a strange delusion?"

"And if, in point of fact, you were at heart Mary Melville's all the time?"

"You're a sad quiz, Mary; but I could almost declare that—"

"You 'love me;' ha, ha, ha. Oh, you dear, dear stupid. Do you imagine that I, any more than Marian, could ever care for such a hard-headed, black-browed man, who has no more idea of how to woo a lady than that blighted thorn-tree which never has any blossom. Ah, it's amazing how much I have to teach you! You must blossom, sir, and grow soft and winning in your air, and then who knows but I may come to think of you, should I happen to grow old, without seeing how I can do better! Look, there come happy Edith Lockhart and her dear Archer Calvert. He is standing on the top of the stile and reaching down to help her. How I envy the poor girl; how I should like to marry Archer—not that I believe I should have much fun in worrying such a simple-hearted fellow; no, but it would be pleasant even to be kind to such a man!"

Archer and his fair companion were beyond speaking distance, and when they had got over the stile they turned away from the wood from which Mary was observing them. They had danced till the band stopped, and it may be presumed that Edith, when consulted, had set her partner's mind at ease about Miss Lushet's indulgence in permitting him to spend the evening with her. At any rate the couple looked very happy, and quite bent upon enjoying each other's society as long, at least, as Miss Bracy left them at liberty to do so. They did not see Ellis and Mary in the wood, and they were rambling about without in the

least caring in what direction they went. Soon after passing the wood they came upon a waste overgrown with wild raspberries, and these they at once began to gather gleefully.

"Here are white ones. The plants must have been thrown out from the garden, I suppose," said Archer, breaking off twigs laden with berries.

Edith could not with her light dress penetrate to where he stood, and presently he brought her a large bouquet of fruit branches.

"Do you remember the old garden at Ashcroft?" he added, as he helped himself to berries, while holding the bunch for Edith to pluck those she preferred.

Edith, of course, had not forgotten the green Gascoignes, and she blushed prettily as she thought how it was while eating them from the cabbage leaf that she had first distinctly felt the growth of a tie which now united her to Archer more closely than she might have cared to confess to him. Archer's feelings were not unlike hers, and he plucked and ate the berries in silence. While with Miss Lockart in Bracy's presence he had felt at liberty, as per agreement, to make all manner of pretty speeches to her, and to treat her with the gallantry his feelings dictated; but when thus alone with Edith the agreement or league seemed necessarily in abeyance. He could no longer make tender advances under the disguise of playful attentions, and to make them confessedly in earnest seemed impossible, while his awkward liaison with Bracy continued to embarrass him. He could not so ungratefully use the liberty he seemed to owe to Bracy's good-nature, and he could not for a moment suppose that Edith, even though already attached to him, would, in the circumstances, permit

herself to be addressed with undisguised gallantry, to the prejudice of her rival.

A little embarrassed, the pair moved away from the raspberry brake, and together wended their way through a stripe of plantation, Archer still holding the bouquet of fruit branches so that Edith could pluck from them as she went. Beyond the plantation was an open grass plot. They were not bound for any place in particular, and they might as well cross the grass as go anywhere else.

"How prettily tinged with crimson the daisies are here," said Edith, but almost inaudibly, for she was speaking with an effort, and merely to break the pause in their conversation.

Her remark was, however, sufficient to direct Archer's attention to the ground, and as they walked on both looked at the crimson-tipped daisies. When about the middle of the open space, Edith stooped to gather some flowers, and Archer bent his knee to assist. In doing so he happened to glance at a shrubbery bounding the grass, and started when he saw on its margin a lady and gentleman sitting on a rustic seat. He touched Edith, and she got up quickly when she saw that they were not alone. The lady on the seat had her eyes fixed on the ground, and the gentleman, with a tender air, held one of her hands between both of his. Neither had observed the intruders, and for a moment Edith and Archer thought they might slip off undiscovered. They moved on with that intention, but unluckily they were to the west of the seat, and the evening sun threw their shadows to the very feet of the unconscious couple. The lady looked up and saw them, and the gentleman, looking where she looked, saw them too, and coloured

very red indeed. They were Miss Bracy Lushet and Mr. Evans.

Edith paused, at a loss whether to hurry away with Archer or to advance and speak to Bracy; but the latter solved the question at once by rising and coming forward with her hand on Mr. Evans' arm. There was only the suspicion of a blush on her richly tinted cheeks, and her air was as noble and serene as ever.

" You have surprised us, Miss Lockart," she said, " or we have surprised you. The surprise, in fact, is mutual, as our confessions may be ! Dear Archer, you saw my hand in Mr. Evans', and must have already guessed that it is his. We have been engaged for some weeks, but were anxious for a little to keep our happiness a secret. You are already an acquaintance of Mr. Evans', and for my sake you will, I hope, consider him your friend in future. Do not think that I have been unkind in concealing from so dear a friend as yourself a matter which could not but interest you—you with whom I have spent so many pleasant hours. Mr. Evans had good reasons for wishing our engagement to be quite unknown until next month, and he would not let me tell you even, though well aware that I counted you among my brothers."

She took both of Archer's hands while speaking, and propitiated him by a look of such friendly interest, that he felt quite melted.

" This little deceit once pardoned, we shall be on as good terms as ever, shall we not, Captain Calvert ? Mr. Evans has always sympathized with my regard for the brave hero of the countermine, and many a time we have talked of your adventures."

Evans, who had recovered his ordinary coolness,

nodded his assent, and looked at Archer with perfect composure, while the latter, somewhat bewildered by surprise and delight, blundered out such words of congratulation as came to his lips.

"By-the-bye, dear Archer," added Miss Bracy, "since I saw you at Ashcroft, I have received a letter from my father, announcing that he has quite arranged about his exchange into a Bengal regiment without going to London, and that he will probably sail in the same ship with you. When I spoke to you before of this, you know how much I feared that you were likely to return to India alone. I sincerely trust that there is now no chance of that, even should my father not happen to be your companion. I have not been blind to-day; and you can imagine the pleasure with which I have made my observations, when you remember how often I have advised you to 'look about you.'"

The bland lady glanced covertly at Edith, who, scarcely less perplexed than Archer, was again gathering daisies; and she smiled expressively, to show how sure she was that he had at last "looked about him" to some purpose.

"More I must not say, perhaps, even after my own confession," she continued, as she again pressed, and then gently released Archer's hands. "You and Miss Lockart will, of course, respect Mr. Evans' secret, and we leave you without apprehension on that score. Fare ye both well."

With a gracious bow to Archer and his companion, she again took Mr. Evans' arm, and the lofty pair moved off slowly and calmly, and passed presently into the wood, leaving Calvert looking after them, and Edith more than ever intent upon the daisies.

Lost in amazement, he continued to gaze at the spot where they had disappeared, and, his thoughts hardly even mentally taking shape in words, he remained speechless. At length, almost with a start, recalling the fact that he was not alone, he turned timidly towards Edith, and saw that, still embarrassed, she was gathering more and more daisies, evidently just to escape his eye. For a moment he felt prompted to drop on the grass beside her, and possess himself of those little hands which seemed so busy ; but some remains of intelligence stopped him, and he stood looking down at her little figure, and upon the crown of her Leghorn hat with a wavering air, while thought grew busy in his brain.

Suddenly, then and there, to express in impassioned words all the feelings pent up in his heart, might, he began to see, shock, even though it might not surprise or positively displease Miss Lockart. He was now obviously enough off with the old love, but to declare himself openly for the new, while the surprising words which had set him free were still ringing in his ear, would, he feared, be rather indelicate. Then, again, might not the little play he had been acting with Miss Lockart for Bracy's benefit, have really been gone into by Edith in mere good-nature to oblige him ? He had acted the ardent suitor not only to the life, but with all his heart ; but had she received his addresses with a pleasure as real as it was prettily expressed ? Could he dare to assume that she had been as much interested in the play as he was ? Reflections and questions such as these besieged his mind, and he found himself unable to decide what it would be right for him to do.

Fortunately, before his silence had become positively

marked, the comical aspect of the whole affair became uppermost in his sight. The absurdity of the scrape he had been in, the ludicrousness of all his apprehensions occasioned by Bracy's kind attentions, the amazingly quiet matter-of-fact way in which the beautiful lady had, without, perhaps, a suspicion of his dilemma, explained everything, and then sailed away with flying colours, occurred to him in such a mirth-provoking crowd of fantastic images that he speedily forgot the awkwardness of his position, and burst into one of those inextinguishable fits of laughter which occasionally surprised his friends.

He could not have done better. His infectious laughter seized upon Edith, and in a moment put her at her ease by relieving her from an embarrassing anxiety as to what he might say to her. Free, so to speak, to feel all the comicalness of Calvert's recent position, and of her own grave view of it, she joined fully in his mirth, and her laughter, if less loud, was soon as spontaneous and hearty as his own. The wood echoes rang again, the daisies were scattered in showers, and, on the best of terms, in high glee, and in merry converse, the happy couple resumed their walk, and rambled on and on till at length the lowness of the sun in the western sky reminded them of the hour, and of the necessity they were under of returning to the terrace before the party broke up.

No mutual confession of their deepest feelings occurred, but every minute soft glances and the tuneful mingling of innocent mirth conspired to knit their willing hearts in one, and when, by-and-by, Edith shook hands with the genial hostess, a bright blush answered the intelligent sparkle of old Mrs. Melville's eyes.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"THE Dingle guests must be going home to dinner now, if they were invited only to a lunch party. It is not far from six o'clock," said Miss Pentonville, idly filling her hands with dry sand and letting it stream between her fingers.

"Angus dines at half-past six," mused Lady Lockart. "I hope he is not fatigued. It must have been very trying to go to a young party after being a recluse so long. Edith will give us a full account of it."

The Oden ladies lay among the bent on the seaward slope of a sand hillock just beyond high-water mark, and a few yards from them, on the beach, Master Ebon was hard at work with a wooden spade raising walls to resist the advancing tide. He was dressed in Dina's suit of dark blue velvet and scarlet stockings, but having lately engaged in a rolling match with Flash, his aunt's terrier, his new clothes were covered with sand, and his gold-laced cap was still affording amusement to his shaggy little playfellow. Ebon's dark curls were blown about by the evening breeze, and his cheeks were flushed and his eyes brightened by his exertions. Though usually a pale and quiet child, he showed abundance of energy and fire when excited. To keep the sea back was plainly no easy matter, and

he worked very hard at the bulwark designed to oppose it. For a time this sufficed to break and divide the shallow waves which came up against it, but, by-and-by, as these sapped its foundations, his higher outworks began to topple over and dissolve away into the rising water.

"Oh, help, help me!" he cried, as he saw the strongest walls sinking in succession.

"Let us help him," said Dina, catching up one of several wooden spades of different sizes, which had been provided that Ebon might be sure to find one to suit him.

Lucy rose laughing, and hastened with her sister to assist the young engineer. With great activity, both dug up the sand, and threw it in heaps upon the vanishing walls, where Ebon enthusiastically patted and beat it to consolidate the works; while, on the other hand, Flash, the terrier, excited by the exertions of his mistress, dashed about frantically, and made fierce and destructive burrowings into the mound which her toil was raising.

The ladies were merry; the boy, saving an occasional exclamation, laboured in silence and with all his might, and the dog barked and growled. Long-winged gulls, roused from their fishings in the neighbouring shallows, hovered over the group with shrill cries.

The tide had already reached nearly its full height. The water continued for a while to flow on each side of the sand heaps, indeed, and to carry away the outlying defences; but so much were the principal walls strengthened by the activity of the diggers, that its force had abated, and the tide had grown uncertain in its progress, and at length fairly turned before these

were materially encroached upon. When Ebon saw that the water, though it still came up briskly, told less and less upon his castle, he worked harder to perfect his victory than he had done to achieve it, and by the time the last wave had retired, his principal tower was broad enough to support his own weight.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, plucking his cap from Flash's mouth. "Hurrah, the day is ours!"

No doubt he was an energetic youth, and if he had not compelled the sea to beat a retreat, he had given promise of qualities likely to insure him success in tasks hardly less arduous.

Dina, in her excitement, was nearly as well persuaded as her boy was that the sea had been beaten, or she looked upon its retirement before Ebon's perseverance as a good omen. At any rate, it was with a cry of triumph, and not a little enthusiasm, that she presently threw away her spade, and embracing the young hero, carried him off to the upper sands, where, dropping him upon a soft bank, she gave vent to her feelings in gurglings of delight and kisses uncountable.

She had by this time quite established her right to kiss him, even when the example was not shown by his aunt, or at least he, propitiated by her tenderness, generally admitted her claim. When, upon the evening of his arrival, she fell upon him suddenly with that burst of passionate caresses already described, he was surprised; but when his aunt hastened to explain that Mrs. Penton had once lost a little son very like him, his quick instinct accounted for the lady's tears and kisses, and he submitted with a touching gentleness that gave a fresh impulse to poor Dina's feelings. Since then, he had several times nestled of his own accord to the fond lady's

side, when observing her gaze bent upon him, and had shown by his silence and his sympathizing look that he was quite willing to be caressed, if that would afford any comfort to his aunt's friend. It does not need to be added, that his mother gratefully took all the comfort the closest caresses could afford, and fondly flattered herself that she was winning the little fellow's heart even quicker than she had hoped to do so.

That first night she had found it hard to let Robina occupy the second bed in the boy's room, according to Lockart's instructions, and before retiring, she had slipped noiselessly to her darling's side, and feasted her eyes upon his sleeping face through a full hour of silent watching.

In the morning she was the first to rise, and having carried all the new clothes she had made to Ebon's room, she waited there quietly till the sunshine roused him. The boy opened his eyes upon the blue velvet suit and admired it greatly, all his clothes having been black hitherto. Dina assisted him to wash and dress, and then she brushed and curled his hair, and in praising its glossiness found somehow an excuse for kissing him. Her task was quite accomplished by the time Robina rubbed her eyes, and saw herself superseded by the singular "companion" of her little charge's aunt.

"Blue velvet! Lor 'a mercy, mam, Sir Angus never allows master Ebon a bit of colour, never since his lady's death, who was drowned in the river Tay full two years ago," exclaimed the maid in mingled wonder and consternation.

Dina not having anticipated this objection to the bright suit she had made was silent, and drawing the lad to her, and, kissing him again, felt touched by the

proof it afforded of her husband's sorrow, while she, at the same time, realized the actual suitableness of her choice. Doubtless it was thus Angus would dress his child when he saw his lost wife alive and well, and sought how to express his joy.

"Miss Pentonville will write to Sir Angus about it," she said, after a while, being, in fact, quite unable to devise a better answer.

Master Ebon himself appeared to be impressed by what his nurse had said, and he looked down dubiously at his scarlet stockings.

"I think my poor mamma liked black things," he said thoughtfully, and looking up in the lady's face with a quiet appeal to her judgment.

"No, no, no," said she, in vain trying not to sob as she pressed him to her bosom.

His mother was a forbidden subject between the lad and his nurse, so Robina did not attempt to explain why his clothes were always black.

"She liked pretty things. I know she did," whispered Dina as soon as she could command her voice, "and when you go home your papa will wish you to dress in bright colours, I'm sure he will. He will not grieve—"

The gentle lady paused. The time had not come for explanations, and she rose from her seat confused, and with a feeling that she had better go away at present. Robina was evidently impatient to get up, and at the same time doubtful if it would be respectful to do so while the lady was in the room. Dina found an excuse in this for hurrying away, but she left Ebon behind without thinking of an excuse for that.

"Mayn't I go with you, Mrs Penton?" said Ebon, wonderingly, when she had reached the door.

Dina hesitated. It was really to escape for a moment from conversation with him that she was going away; but her longing for him got the upper hand, and, returning, she led him off.

After breakfast he accompanied his mother and aunt to the flower and fruit gardens. These he admired with gravity, making from memory, as he stepped among the plants, several sage observations on cultivation, which greatly impressed his admiring relatives; but when the party reached a little enclosure containing some white rabbits, which had been bought expressly for him, all the boy at last broke forth, to his mother's immense relief, and jumping over the fence he began to fondle the little animals with a delightful disregard of the marks their dirty feet made on his tunic. From the window I see some smart young gentlemen just turned out to play by their tidy nurses. The water cart is passing, and they think it great fun to scamper through the refreshing shower, and then tumble each other over in the dust. It would be a pity were they more thoughtful at their years; and Dina was much too happy to see that polite Master Ebon, who had awed her by his calmness, confess himself a child, to care how he soiled the velvet she had laboured on for weeks.

From the rabbit-house the party soon passed to the stable, Ebon carrying a rabbit in his arms. The ponies were busy with their morning oats.

"This is Master Lockart, Malcom," said Miss Pentonville, "come to see his pony."

Malcom doffed his cap to the youngster, and looked at him with a certain wonder. He had not heard the

lad's age, though he had been commissioned to purchase a pony for him, and he rather doubted if such a mere child would be able to ride. Ebon bowed to him in a stately yet friendly way and marched into the stable.

"The white one is yours, dear," exclaimed Aunt Lucy.

"Did you get it for me, aunt?"

"Yes; that is, Mrs. Penton and I got it for you."

Ebon looked admiringly at the pony, which was a very handsome one, with a narrow back, suitable for a small rider, and then he turned to the ladies again with blushing cheeks. He wished to thank his aunt, but the allusion to Mrs. Penton puzzled him. Why was Mrs. Penton so kind to him? He hesitated a moment, and then took one of Dina's hands in his while he looked at Lucy, and said, "Thank you, aunt."

His mode of thanking Dina was evidently by silently expressing his tenderness for the kind lady who had lost a boy of her own, and therefore took pleasure in pleasing her friend's nephew.

In the course of the day Ebon rode out with the ladies, and distinguished himself by skilful management of his spirited steed, and by the steadiness with which he "took" some of the highest whin bushes on the common.

An early dinner followed his ride, and then the young equestrian suggested a visit to the sands, where great was his mother's delight when she saw the child uppermost in him again the moment he caught sight of the wooden spades provided for his amusement. How he used them, and with what success against the tide I have already shown.

"I shall call you aunt also," said Ebon gravely, when

Dina had sufficiently expressed her enthusiasm touching his contest with the sea. "What is your first name, Mrs. Penton?"

Here was another puzzle for his mother. Miss Pentonville had been careful to avoid calling her Dina in his presence, because the name was too uncommon to escape the attention of the lad's father should he hear it repeated. In the presence of the domestics she always addressed her sister as Mrs. Penton, and as yet no Christian name had been selected for that lady's use in public.

Lady Lockart had a singular inaptitude for fibbing, and so, not knowing how to answer the lad, she took to parting his hair, and pressing her lips on his forehead.

"You like me, then?" she said after a while.

"I like you very much," replied the child frankly, though, in truth, in his generous heart it was probably rather pity than fondness he felt for the gentle friend whose tears were so ready.

"I think your name is Marian," he presently added, reminding Dina that she had not answered him.

"Call me Aunt Marian, then, my love. But why do you think that must be my name?"

"Because you sometimes speak like Aunt Edith's Marian--so softly!"

"Who is Aunt Edith's Marian? Her maid?"

"Oh, no. Bennet is her maid, and Marian is her friend, Miss Grange--such a nice girl!"

"Such a nice girl!" cried Dina, laughing. "Does she set her cap at Master Ebon already?"

"No, aunt, I'm too little; but 'Bina says that Aunt Edith wants Miss Grange to set her cap at my papa."

The colour in a moment left Dina's face, and she became of such a deadly paleness that even the child remarked it, and cried out that she was ill, surely. Lucy joined them at the moment and she too noticed her sister's pallor.

"Dina, my love, what ails you ?" she exclaimed, forgetful of the boy's presence.

Dina sank into Lucy's arms, and presently was insensible.

"Run, child, for some water and the servants," cried Lucy, lost in surprise and anxiety.

But long before Ebon could return from the cottage Dina recovered her senses.

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy !" she sobbed, throwing her arms round Lucy's neck.

More she could not say, but her feelings found vent in short shrill shrieks, such as her sister had heard ere this only on one or two occasions.

Greatly alarmed and distressed, Lucy soothed her as best she could, entreating her to confide the cause of her grief to one who had already comforted her in many sorrows.

"Oh, Lucy, he is—"

"Ebon ?"

"No, no, Angus. Angus is going to be—"

"Married ?" silently suggested Lucy's foreboding soul.

She shuddered at the thought, till Dina, dismayed by her distress, became in turn the comforter.

"It cannot be ; no, it is impossible ; but, oh, Lucy, it was dreadful to think of it just when I had grown so very, very happy !"

With difficulty Lucy extracted an exact account of what Ebon had said, and then showed, in her matter-of-

fact way, that her sister had taken alarm at her own wild fancy rather than at any real danger.

Presently Ebon came running back with a jug of water, of which he had spilt two-thirds of the contents by the way. As it was not needed for her face, Dina put the water to her lips, and then thanked the lad, and apologized to the cottage servants as they arrived breathless.

When the latter had retired, Ebon slipped down beside his mother, and, clasping his little hands round her arm, murmured,—

“Aunt Dina.”

The ladies were startled and scared for a moment.

“Why do you call her that, Ebon?” asked Lucy, almost knitting her brows.

“That is Mrs. Penton’s name. She would not tell it me, but I heard you call her so,” said the boy, with the light of triumph in his dark eyes.

“Why wouldn’t Mrs. Penton tell you?” said sly Lucy, who had a more ladylike conscience than her sister, and now that the name was known, proposed artfully to conceal the fact that there had been any wish to hide it.

“I don’t know,” answered the youngster candidly. “Perhaps just for fun.”

“We’re very fond of fun,” said Lucy.

But Dina cared little now about the discovery of her name. She was burning with desire to hear more about Marian Grange, and, summoning all her courage, she asked,—

“What is Aunt Edith’s friend like, Ebon dear? Is she like me?”

“Oh, not at all, Aunt Dina.”

There was a little malice, perhaps, in this "Aunt Dina," but Lucy took no further notice of it, and, willing to assist her sister, asked simply if Miss Grange was often at Beechworth.

"Very often," replied Ebon, smiling as if at the recollection of Marian, who certainly was always very kind to him.

"And does your papa always see her?"

Dina scarcely drew breath till the lad slowly, and with another smile, answered,—

"Oh, no, Aunt Lucy; very seldom. My papa does not like young ladies to come about him, 'Bina says."

"But does your Aunt Edith not take Miss Grange to see him?"

"Papa is in the library, and ladies don't go there. But Aunt Edith had a party one day, and papa spoke to Miss Grange on the hill for a good while. I was there, and papa asked me when she went away how I liked her; and so Robina said that was because Aunt Edith had her so often up at the house, and wanted her to be my new mamma."

This was a long speech for Master Ebon, who was not very talkative, and by the flushing of his cheek he seemed to consider it rather an achievement.

Dina could not find voice to question him further, and as she was very pale again, Lucy thought it best to change the subject.

"Here, Flash!" she cried, and her terrier, which had been worrying imaginary rats in the sand, bounded to her feet.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THERE was but one Sunday service in Linbrook parish church, and it began at noon. When conducted by Mr. Eagle, who was always willing to officiate for his father's old friend, the Rev. Crispin Collins, now in infirm health, it was neither extremely long nor extremely tedious, which is more than could be said for it when the minister himself lectured for three-quarters of an hour before preaching for fifty minutes, in order that the weary hinds sleeping in the back-seats might lose as little as possible by the want of a second service.

Mr. Eagle offered up several short prayers instead of one or two long ones ; his remarks on the chapters read from Scripture were brief and pointed, and his sermon, freely touching on matters of every-day life, was generally so interesting as to keep the majority of his congregation awake.

Mr. Grange and the other principal heritors occupied the seats next the walls, and farthest from the pulpit, while the central seats were chiefly devoted to the humbler members of the church. It was pleasant to see Mr. Grange in church, especially while the psalms were being sung. He looked at once so jovial and so reverential, that one felt satisfied that his religion was a thoroughly wholesome thing. Mr. Melville's appear-

ance there was still more impressive, though in a different way. His figure recalled that of the venerable Wordsworth, serene in his church at Grasmere. Indeed, though smaller featured, he was like Wordsworth, particularly in his bearing. Mrs. Melville, his mother, being unable to walk, now rarely went to church, satisfied that it was nearly as edifying to read two sermons, her usual allowance before lunch, as to listen to one. But her grand-daughters, of course, usually accompanied their papas; and the day after the Dingle party, while Sarah and Mary sat one on each side of Mr. Melville, Marian and Polly looked no less dutiful and devout between Mrs. Beagle and the Laird of Ashcroft.

Angus Lockart, his horses having been out for six successive days, was not in church this Sunday. Indeed, his Saturday afternoon party had somewhat fatigued him, and he was glad to spend the greater part of the day quietly in his study, before one of those books with which Mr. Maurice is pleased to bewilder such of his readers as have not found the key to his system of secular theology. But Edith was in her usual seat, and her walk to church having necessarily been past Ashcroft, it need hardly be added that the gentleman beside her, who assiduously held the psalm-book from which she sang, was Captain Calvert.

The service over, among the last to quit the church were Archer and Edith. When they passed out to the graveyard, in the middle of which the church stood, most of the congregation had left it. Archer had not been there before, and Edith suggested that they should walk round the church. The yard was green with long grass in spite of the withering sunshine of a hot sum-

mer, for a few large elm trees spread their branches over it, and kept the ground comparatively cool and moist. The tablets and stones scattered about it were for the most part of a very humble character, and time had worn away many of the inscriptions. Before one of the least obtrusive stones Edith paused, and drawing her companion's attention to it, said,—

“This is where my poor sister-in-law lies at present.”

Archer, much interested, looked at a small square stone, such as those which, in the fenceless valley of the Upper Rhine, mark the boundaries of the several estates. “D. L.” he read, and these were the only letters on the stone.

“Dina Lockart,” said Edith, explaining the letters. “You have heard that Lady Lockart was drowned in the Tay? She was not found until some weeks afterwards, and my brother did not venture to see the remains, poor fellow. Some feeling I did not at the time understand made him determine that they should be temporarily placed here, sealed in lead. I suppose that by-and-by Dina’s grave will be in the family burial-ground at Glenrufus. Indeed, I know that one reason for placing her as it were secretly in an unknown grave is now removed.”

Archer remembered distinctly enough all that Dr. Wilmotte had told him of Lady Lockart’s misfortunes and death, so that he would have looked with interest at her grave, even had no beloved voice thus spoken of it in soft and pitiful accents, but he made no remark, and after lingering beside the stone for a few minutes the pair moved away, and proceeded to walk round the church—an ancient but humble structure with a square

tower and a roof of broad flag-stones. The village did not intrude upon it very closely, and the trees and enclosing walls gave it a certain air of seclusion.

The Grange and Melville parties were already on their way home when Calvert and his fair companion left the gate, and neither of the latter made any effort to overtake them. But if Archer hoped by slow walking to keep Edith to himself he was disappointed, for he had not walked far on the Ashcroft road when Mr. Eagle, who had been detained by the parish-clerk, came up behind. Archer then remembered that it was Mr. Eagle's practice to dine with the Lockarts after preaching at Linbrook, and he saw himself deprived for the day at least of the exclusive enjoyment of Edith's society.

It vexed, and even a little surprised him that, short as was the time she had now a chance of spending apart with himself, Edith showed no disposition to quicken her pace so as to overtake the rest of the party, and thus give Mr. Eagle an opportunity of leaving her side.

The clergyman was very courteous to her, and Archer could not object to that; but he soon observed that there was more than courtesy in Mr. Eagle's manner, there was also a sort of tenderness, a tenderness which was expressed too, Archer fancied, as if its expression was an exclusive right or privilege of the speaker. Mr. Eagle seemed to have, or at least to feel, a personal interest in the lady by his side, and he talked of her affairs and those of her brother in an intimate and familiar manner.

Archer walked on in silence, and Edith made no attempt to draw him into the conversation. He had

never heard her speak more fluently or more pleasantly, and, so limited was his knowledge of women, he began to gnaw his lips with a sense of mortification and pain.

At last they reached the Ashcroft party, the Squire having stopped on the road till they made up the distance.

Polly Grange, who had glanced back many times without venturing ever to turn her head quite round, stood a little aside, somewhat shyly, and then blushed with unconcealable pleasure when Mr. Eagle, after shaking hands with Mr. Grange and Marian, gently pressed her plump fingers, and took up his position in the walk at her side instead of at Edith's.

Of course Archer was as glad of this change as Polly could be, but he soon found that the courteous Squire was nearly as much in his way as Mr. Eagle had been, and until Ashcroft was reached it was impossible for him to do more than address an occasional sentence to Edith.

This was, perhaps, as well for him. He was now, in fact, hardly in a humour for a tête-à-tête with the object of his devotion. Jealousy sets reason and common sense continually at defiance, and already the poor fellow's old jealousy of Mr. Eagle had revived. No story-teller need ever be challenged to account for jealousy in a manner satisfactory to the dispassionate reader. The lover will never cease to look with a jaundiced eye on every man and every incident, however trivial, which for a moment seems to cross his path, and he ever will, too, with incurable infatuation, think himself guided by convincing evidence and sound reasoning. Perhaps Archer had more apparent reason for his present uneasiness than is usual in such cases. "Did not

I for weeks think that Bracy wanted to marry me, and wasn't she all the while engaged to Evans ? For just a day or two I have hoped that Edith likes me, and merely because Eagle did not speak much to her I gave up fearing that he thought of her. Why shouldn't they be privately or tacitly engaged as much as Bracy and Evans were? May it not be that the readiness with which Edith entered into my silly plan for bringing Bracy's real object to light arose from the fact that she looked upon me as a friend merely ? She is naturally gentle, and she was able to treat me with perfectly frank kindness from being unembarrassed by any particular feeling towards me. What an unlucky soul I am ! Balked at every turn !" Such thoughts of course made Archer bite his lips and fret inwardly.

It would be too much to say that Edith does not observe his vexation, merely because she never seems to look at him. I notice a sort of innocent malice in a smile which at present plays upon her lips, even when a smile is not demanded by the Squire's remarks. She is very good-hearted it is true, but doesn't the softest-hearted girl enjoy tantalizing and fretting her lover ?— And pray, who would grudge her a pleasure so little really hurtful to her victim, and, alas for her, so fleeting ?

" You were to have this letter, sir, the moment you arrived," said Janet, the Ashcroft waiting-maid, addressing Captain Calvert, just as the party reached the avenue gate, and Miss Lockart and Eagle, who did not propose to enter, were on the point of saying their adieu.

Archer broke the seal in some dismay, but his face brightened instantly.

"Sir Angus asks me to go on with Miss Lockart and Mr. Eagle, to dine at Beechworth," he said.

Then it occurred to him that it might be discourteous to leave the family who had been so kind to him, and he looked a little blankly towards the Squire.

"Never think of standing on ceremony with us, my boy," said Mr. Grange heartily. "We'll hold you fast for a day longer, to make up for your desertion of us now. I beg you will not disappoint Sir Angus, whose improving appetite is worthy of all encouragement."

Calvert saw that he would most gratify the Squire by pleasing himself, so, with suitable apologies to the Misses Grange, he confessed his intention of going on with Miss Lockart.

That young lady smiled, and thanked him with much graciousness, and her colour rose but little, even when she felt the expressiveness of a prolonged pressure with which Marian's hand congratulated her.

CHAPTER XLIX.

" JIST listen tae this, sir : 'The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. To these officers the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins ; to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures ; and to open it unto penitent sinners by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.' Do ye ca' that onything better than Papistry, sir ?" cried Mrs. Doherty, grasping Mr. Eagle's coat-sleeve with one hand, while with the other she held open the Confession of the Kirk of Scotland.

Mr. Eagle, in his sermon, had incidentally spoken of the blessing of belonging to a church in which the right of private judgment was recognised, and of which the clergy were not priests but pastors ; and Mrs. Doherty, ever eager to vindicate her privilege of private judgment, had hurried home by short cuts, that she might be in time to catch the minister, should he happen to pass her cottage on his way to Beechworth. The moment he turned the corner and came before her door, she darted out, and book in hand, addressed him as above.

She was rather a remarkable figure : her black silk Sunday bonnet, and black silk Sunday gown, both in very fair condition, having been out of fashion for many years. Indeed, the bonnet was of that coal-scuttle shape by which Mr. Punch is in the habit of concealing the venerable features of Mrs. Standard and Mrs. Herald, when depicting these congenial gossips. But if the aged widow's dress was old-wifeish, her face was still as piquant and animated as it could have been in her youth ; and when Mr. Eagle happened to meet her sharp glance in the course of one of his sermons, he was not unfrequently conscious of a sudden anxiety to word his remarks with more precision than he had immediately before deemed necessary.

"Ministers are no priests, ye say, sir," she went on, without giving Mr. Eagle time to reply. "Is it, then, the elders wha are preevileged tae remit sins ? We've but ministers and elders, I'm thinkin'. Nane besides can be ca'd officers o' the kirk. Ane or the ither hauld the keys o' the kingdom of heaven according tae the Confession, an' as the ministers are abune the elders, naething, sir, can be meant but that the like o' yersel', Mr. Eagle, hae the power tae open and shut the gates o' heaven. What, then, are ye but a priest ? The Pope himsel' claims nae mair power wi' the keys than this o' 'shuttin' the kingdom by censures,' and openin' it by 'absolution from censures,' when the officers o' the church deem the man afore them tae be a sinner or a penitent. Says the Pope,—puir body ! and his priests, demented craeters!—'We are the successors o' St. Peter, and the Apostles, an' a' the powers committed unto them hae we. What they bound on earth was bound in heaven ; what we on earth bind, that too is bound in

heaven.' Say the ministers o' the kirk,—'We are the successors o' the Apostles ; the Lord has set us up as officers tae govern and judge, and has given unto us the keys o' the Kingdom o' Heaven, by virtue whereof we retain and remit sins, and open or shut the gate as our people tak the word frae our mouth, or cast it back in our teeth.' (For that's jist the lang and the short o' it.) Weel wad it be for the kirk, sir, were what ye said o' its ministers true, but wi' that 30th chapter o' the Confession starin' ye in the face, I canna think, Mr. Eagle, hoo ye come tae gie sich a guid accoont o' yersel's."

Mr. Eagle, who never lacked good humour, stood very patiently with his sleeve in the old woman's grasp while she thus admonished him.

"Are ye no gaun tae answer me ?" she resumed, still holding fast. "Then I'll jist tell ye o' a wheen ither things I've faun in wi' that mair and mair maks me doot gin our kirk, that I've been a member o' these fourscore years and mair, has been built sae strongly on the Word and guided sae meikle by the Speerit o' Truth as folk say. Hear ye this,—'They who, having never heard the gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, or the law of that religion which they profess.' So then, sir, the kirk has not heard that 'for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,' ay, and that countin' back tae Adam himsel' ; and it tells us that our blessed Lord died for but a wheen o' us like, and left the better pairt o' mankind tae perish miserably without mercy. This, oot o' an ill-read text here, and a waur read ane there, the kirk gathers frae the saving Word, and sae blasphemeth the Lord Almighty, wha is merciful and just,

slow to wrath, and full of compassion. What say ye, sir, for a kirk like that? Peety me, wha for fourscore years thocht sae little o' seein' nations upon nations, wha ne'er heard o' their Saviour, condemned tae bleeze in hell for *that*, while I, and twa or three folk like mysel', wad in heavenly robes be singin' praises tae the Lamb,—content tae think that He bled for *us*, and for nane but oorsel's! But ye're no orthodox eneuch, Mr. Eagle, tae be sich a self-sufficient fule as I was."

"I think, Mrs. Doherty, that Jesus made himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Another time I may consider our Church's teaching with you, but in the meanwhile I frankly admit that all pious and gentle souls are dear to our Lord, by whatsoever name they in their ignorance address the Universal Father. I can assign no limit to His love, none to His mercy, though at the same time I feel that I could not consider Him either unjust or unkind in condemning myself, for instance, to a very large measure of that spiritual torture which some people seem to suppose it His chief occupation to inflict upon His wayward children."

"Ah, I was shure that ye waurna sae orthodox, sir, as tae think ill o' the Lord wha made ye. It's no in the Confession that ye learnt that some folk besides protestant Christians hae a chance o' heaven! Ye'll be for 'coming oot o' her' some day, Mr Eagle."

"Nay, I hope not, Mrs. Doherty. I see signs here and there that even into her manses a suspicion is creeping that, after all, the New Testament may be of fully more authority than the Westminster Confession."

"Weel, sir, ye've young een by me, and I pray that ye dinna see but the image o' yer ain thought!"

It is impossible to say to what length Mrs. Doherty

might have carried her criticisms had she not been interrupted by the appearance of Maggie Miller or Doherty at the door. Maggie had been sitting in the "far ben" room of the cottage, and hearing voices outside, curiosity brought her forth to see the speakers. She had her child in her arms, and her pretty but somewhat silly-looking face was beaming with contentment. Pike had gone off to the Highlands without molesting her further, and as she was established in his grandmother's house on the footing of a daughter, it seemed to her innocent mind that she had but to wait patiently till her husband chose to return and acknowledge her fully.

Archer, who with Edith Lockart had been standing a little apart from the widow and her victim, recognised Maggie instantly, and greeted her good-humouredly.

The recognition was mutual, and Maggie, blushing and curtseying, offered the child to Archer, who, however, only looked at it with interest. "Well-a-day! to think of having put one's neck in jeopardy for such an insignificant morsel of pink flesh!" was his inward commentary. Audibly he said nothing; but when Edith, with moistening eyes, took the babe in her arms and looked doubly bewitching thus, he poked a finger into its open mouth and purred at it in what he supposed might pass for baby language.

Edith kissed and made of it, thinking the while, however, only of Archer and of the risk he had run. But presently the infant began to cry, and Edith, being quite unused to the ways of young babies, returned it hastily to its mother in some alarm. Archer laughed at her, and she laughed at herself, and Eagle and the old lady smiled; but Maggie, thinking that Edith must

have hurt the little thing by holding it the wrong way, looked quite cross and marched into the garden tossing her little red head and rocking the babe in her arms in a manner which seemed to express,—“ My puir wee pet ! Did they hurt him ? Much fine ladies know of babies, indeed ! lullaby, lullaby.”

“ Puir lass,” said the widow, shaking her vast bonnet and looking after the young mother in not an unkindly way, “ she’ll naether dee for her wit nor be drowned for a warlock ; but it’s a silly hen that canna scrape for ae bird.”

Archer laughed again, and looked admiringly at the old woman, whose attack upon Mr. Eagle he had rather approved of. But Edith, apprehensive that their laughter might hurt the poor girl’s feelings, begged Eagle to help to comfort her, and went off to the garden with him.

Archer, not quite pleased at this, stood kicking his heels beside Mrs. Doherty, who presently, after eyeing him attentively, remarked half audibly, and as if to herself, “ The young lady nicht dae waur. He’s a proper man, though he wants conceit o’ himsel’.”

Archer turned his clear eyes upon her, and perceiving that she had spoken of himself, he smiled with surprise and gratification.

“ He’s bonny teeth tae,” added the widow presently in the same meditative way, “ and that’s a gude sign o’ him.”

Unable to reply to this, Calvert with relief saw Miss Lockhart and Eagle returning, and was thankful when, probably with the view of escaping another lecture on the Confession of Faith, they, without further delay, bade the old body good-bye.

CHAPTER L.

LOCKART, ready to receive his Sunday guests, was in the drawing-room when they arrived with his sister. Having three windows looking out upon the south garden and shrubbery, and as many looking over undulating fields to the Forth, and across it to Fife, the drawing-room was a cheerful and light apartment. Angus, enjoying the sunshine, which slanted in in a rapidly narrowing stream as the sun dipped into the west, sat at one of the south windows with books beside him on the broad window-sill.

He welcomed Calvert with marked cordiality, and Eagle as a brother, with whom it was hardly necessary to shake hands. Edith hovered a moment at the door, and then retired to her own room to prepare for dinner, which on Sunday was taken at an early hour.

" You are not the worse of your exertions yesterday ? " said Mr. Eagle.

" Slightly fatigued by the unusual excitement of the last two days," replied Angus ; " but feeling stronger in spite of that, I have been hopping about the room without my sticks in quite a marvellous way."

" Without your sticks ! Well done ! and in such a hot day."

"Hot day; so it is. The dust must have been disagreeable on the road. You had better both go to my room and wash it out of your ears."

The suggestion was acceptable, and Eagle and Calvert departed.

About half an hour afterwards, Edith, in a blue dress, and with blue ribbons woven among her hair-plaits, sailed into the room blooming and fresh, but with a singular flicker in her eyes which seemed hardly in keeping with her smile. She went straight to her brother, and, dropping on one knee beside him, took his hands in hers, and whispered,—

"Vidocq was listening at the door, Angus. I saw him slip away into the dining-room when he heard me on the stair."

"I suspected that," replied Angus in the same tone.

"Oh, then, you minded your words, dear?"

"Yes, Edy. You don't think him a match for me, do you?"

"I wish you wouldn't keep him, Angus, when you see that he can't be trusted."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear; I enjoy fencing with him immensely; and what harm is there in his curiosity? Take care, though, that he does not suspect you of warning me against him."

"I beg your pardon," said Edith, rising, and bowing as she spoke to Mr. Eagle, who had entered with Calvert. "I had a family secret to tell Angus. I should gladly take you and Captain Calvert into counsel about it, if my brother would allow me."

"Not yet, Edy," said Lockart with a side glance at the door which Archer had closed attentively. "In due time they'll no doubt hear enough of it."

"Ah, if you would but take their advice, Angus, nothing disagreeable would occur."

"Come, come; you're getting nervous, my dear. Aren't you a Lockart?"

Edith drew herself up for a moment, and tried to show that she was a Lockart, but the next she stooped with a flutter and kissed her brother's brow.

"Even a Lockart can't face foes who sneak behind his back," she said. "It isn't cowardly, is it, to dislike snakes in the grass which bite unseen, or spring when unexpected?"

"Trust me, child, I'm a wary walker."

Edith saw that it was of no use to urge her request, so she took a seat and addressed Archer, whose eyes had never left her since his entrance.

"My brother enjoyed the Dingle party as much as any of us," she remarked.

"Yes," said Angus, who heard her, "I enjoyed it greatly; thanks to your pretty friend Miss Grange, with whom I had a delightful chat by the side of the Dingle burn, when you young folk had had your dance on the lawn."

"You really liked her, Angus?"

"Exceedingly. I got her to talk at last, and very well she did it, waxing quite eloquent in her father's style now and then."

"What did you talk of, dear?"

"Oh, of everything. She has uncommonly pretty lips, budding and red. Have not you remarked them, Captain Calvert?"

"Yes, they are very nice, and always so; so I don't think she bites them!"

"Or does anything to the wonderful pupils of her violet eyes, eh?"

"Angus dear!"

"My dear sister, you'd better be quiet, or I'll tell Eagle about the box of gold-dust I found on your dressing-table once upon a time."

"Tell Eagle!" repeated Archer to himself, remembering with a sense of discomfort his apprehensions regarding Mr. Eagle.

"I never denied having used it," replied Edith. "But it was only at a fancy ball that I powdered my hair. You don't really believe that Marian does anything to herself? She is as pretty as possible naturally."

"Bitten lips are naturally red," said Angus; "but one may safely admire Miss Grange. I think her very genuine."

"Indeed she is so."

"You see my sister has designs, Captain Calvert. Being only accidentally behind the scenes, you will, of course, not betray us to the young lady."

Lockart was in one of his cheerful moods, and his pale face was brightened by it. Edith, looking at him, thought to herself that Marian couldn't possibly have failed to fall in love with him, and yet it is true that in every point her brother contrasted with the man who had won her own heart.

"Yes," Angus continued, "she talked well when fairly set a-going. We reverted to a topic started here the other evening over the parlour fire. She spoke then of enjoying the ideal more than the real possession of things, and I questioned her about that as we sat by the Dingle burn,—she on an alder-tree branch which lay over the stream, I in my chair on the footpath. She said she could at any time dream herself the mistress of as splendid a house in town as lady ever had, and in

fancy run up its stairs and down them (that was her innocent expression), sit in the drawing-room and receive her guests, give parties and listen to delightful music, sleep under satin upon eider down, and, in short, mentally realize all the delights of having everything she could wish for in connexion with such a house. She could dream, she said, that she was a queen, and thus enjoy all the honour, pomp, and luxury of that state as much as any queen does, and that without any of the annoyances which a real queen must suffer. Of course I congratulated her. She is a little shy, I think. At any rate, having made her speech, she looked disturbed at her own eloquence, and presently exerted herself to pluck a crimson rose which was hanging overhead from one of the alder branches, up which the rose-tree had twisted itself. She was dressed in a linen robe, and the rose had a good effect when she fastened it in front, where it vied with the mobile carnation of her comely cheeks, and the permanent brightness of her girlish lips."

"Dear Angus!" cried Edith, marvelling.

"Didn't I tell you that I admired her, Edy? Of course I watched her pretty movements and innocent blushes while she gathered the rose and decked herself with it. At first, I believe, she thought of presenting me with the rose, but apparently she changed her plan on finding that it was of the scentless kind."

"How could you know that, Angus?"

"One infers such things from just perceptible movements which seem arrested before completion."

"I shouldn't think Marian meant to give you the rose, Angus. You were very conceited in thinking so."

"Well, perhaps she didn't give it me because she

thought I could enjoy it fully by just thinking that I had it. By-the-bye, I illustrated the advantage of merely dreaming of things by contrasting a real and imagined ball. In your dream, you admire and are admired without the slightest annoyance from escaped gas, close air, etc., from awkward tearings of your dress, from ill-waxed floors, from intolerable noise, from disagreeable partners, from slights or boring attentions, from fatigue, and, generally, from every sort of *contre temps*. Every pleasantness is leisurely dwelt upon; the soft word, the smile, the look, the courtesy and grace of your freely chosen partner, are not lost in a moment, or missed in the distracting crowd. And so on. My pretty friend smiled gladly to find her own view so readily adopted, and so, to complete her triumph, I congratulated her on being able, by force of imagination, to read pleasant new books before their publication, and without the risk of hurting her eyes,—on the economy and comfort, in fact, of being able to enjoy by anticipation Mr. Dickens' *next* novel, or Mr. Holman Hunt's *next* picture."

"I didn't think you would have had the heart to quiz Marian," said Edith, suspecting with disappointment that her brother had been making game of her friend.

"I tried it, certainly; but your quiet little girl took it very well, and persisted in her own view. Her day-dreams, she said, might not be able to embrace all things, but in regard to many things they would afford more gratification than the things themselves. Of this, at least, she was certain, namely, that in the course of the past year her imagined pleasures had greatly exceeded and outnumbered her real ones. How insipid, how monotonous and dull, comparatively, her life would

have been, she cried, had she been able to enjoy only directly by the senses—actual sight, hearing, touch, taste. Not a week had passed in which she had not vividly, intensely, and she did think to all purposes really enjoyed, many states of existence, many ways of life, innumerable possessions. In the course of any odd ten minutes she, seemingly idle and listless, would rehearse her little drama of a life otherwise beyond her reach, and realize, in a sense, its delights so fully that she could awake and return to the actual grey world without a regret that her happiness had been ideal, and without for an instant envying those living in the circumstances in which, for a few charmed minutes, her imagination had placed her."

"I have heard her talk as well as that, Angus, though at present you may be putting words into her mouth."

"So far from that, Edy, I can't repeat the good things she said without missing her best expressions. I wish my memory were better."

"Then you admired her very much?"

"I made a point of doing that, Edy. Hadn't you particularly enjoined me to do so?"

"Bother! I don't think you've found out how nice she is, after all. I wonder, indeed, if you allowed her to get in a word."

"Little sceptic. How can you care for such a distrustful child, Ralph?"

Ralph Eagle, who stood near Edith, with a gentle, caressing touch moved the end of one of her ringlets, and jealous Archer, sickening at Lockart's question, watched him with flashing eyes.

Edith had her back hair in curls. The front hair

was braided, and then plaited over her head, as I have said, with a blue ribbon. Archer had never seen her look more lovely, and wrathful despair gnawed his heart when he again suspected that his hopes were vain.

Dark eyes, which he took no heed of, were bent upon him, and Angus Lockart studied his emotion calmly.

Edith did not appear to notice the sense in which Archer had taken up her brother's words, and she good-naturedly caught the fingers which had touched her curl, and patted them playfully between hers, for Eagle was her brother's oldest friend, and had never grudged her a kindness. Indeed, she had always considered him as, at least, a first cousin.

"I quite adopt Miss Edith's estimate of her friend," said Eagle.

"Ha, I daresay you do. No doubt you are in the plot against my peace of mind. It's an old alliance.—There's the dinner-bell ! Captain Calvert will take you, Edy, I suppose. He's the newer friend."

Archer, relieved by this unlooked-for proposal, offered his arm joyfully.

CHAPTER LI.

"AND so you really liked me better than Bracy Lushet all along? You were introduced to her and to me the same evening," said Miss Lockart, addressing Captain Calvert, beside whom she sat on a mossy bank, some hours after the dinner, to which he had led her.

"First to you Edith. You have been the star of my life ever since. I am infinitely happy now."

"Well, I, for my part, am not grieved by what has occurred, though I confess it did not in the least strike me that night that my fair-haired and invalid-like partner would ever be anything to me."

"When did you begin to think that he might?"

"I found it out gradually. I remember feeling myself in great danger of blushing one day when you were spoken of incidentally by Angus, and that set me a thinking about you, and a wondering why I didn't feel quite at ease in naming you. I did not make out just then, however, that I really cared much for you. Indeed, in reviewing you in my mind, I rather decided that you were not the sort of man I was likely to fancy."

"Did you? I should have been thankful had I suspected you of even thinking of me. I imagined that Mr. Eagle monopolized your thoughts."

"Eagle? You weren't far wrong, Archer. My brother always praised him, and hinted that he would like me to fancy him when I grew old enough for that sort of thing, which, I daresay, Angus thought might be a score of years hence! And so, as Mr. Eagle was very kind to me, and as nice as possible in many ways, I used to think of him, and suppose that I would be glad when he asked me. This was before I met you. At least it must have been very soon after I met you that I found, on reflection, that I didn't so much care for as admire Mr. Eagle. I admire him, that is, his character, and so on, as much as ever I did. Indeed, perhaps, I still admire him more than I admire you."

"You don't say so! Why, Edith, dearest, that isn't quite the thing, is it? You're joking. You wouldn't have said to me a little ago, what you know you said, had not you really preferred me?"

"Mr. Eagle hadn't asked me."

"My love, what do you mean? I'll jump into that duck-pond if you speak so."

"Are you of such a jealous disposition?"

"Jealous, Edy. That's too bad! Don't you love me, girl?"

"Yes; I think so."

"With all your heart?"

"With all my heart."

"Then what were you saying, dear?"

"About admiring Mr. Eagle?"

"Yes."

"I admire him exceedingly; don't you?"

"Darling! you gave me such a qualm!"

"Then you really were jealous?"

"My pet, a fellow can't take that sort of jesting,

nicely just after such tortures as I've suffered.—What a heavenly breeze ! Heaven ? that is in your eyes. Oh, the soft sunny blue !”

“I thought you liked rich, deep, peaty pools best. Bracy's for instance?”

“Well, Bracy's are soft too in their way. At least I thought so at one time.”

“That is until the romance of novelty was over, Archer ? When our romance is over, then you—”

“The romance of our love over ! You are a cool one to think of such a thing. Before I had dared to hope for you, I thought I could resign you peacefully to such a good fellow as Eagle seemed, but now I'd—Ah, what wouldn't I do first ?”

“Something dreadful, I can imagine. Your very eyes dart lightning ; and I should be glad to see that your tongue isn't forked, dear.”

“My Edy, you're such a dear girl ! Let us be quiet now, and feel how happy we are. Dear little fingers ! how I longed to kiss them when we were eating those ever-to-be-remembered gooseberries ! I didn't think I'd a chance of doing so, and yet for the moment I felt blissful. We seemed to be kindred spirits, held apart, yet together in Eden. You don't need to tell me now that you felt as I did. I knew you were happy ; and yet, strangely enough, it did not occur to me that you were exactly wronging Mr. Eagle, or that our mutual delight in the place, and in each other, if I may speak so, gave me the smallest earnest of this sweet time.”

“You don't guess, Archer, dear, how often I have thought and dreamt of that garden idyll. Surely, and surely, and surely you cared for me then, I have thought ;

and yet it was not till later in that day that I became aware how I liked you, a thousand times better than you could ever like me."

"Much you knew of me, Edith!"

"Gentlest and bravest!"

"Goosie, what stuff!"

"Not stuff. It was when I saw you high on the cliff that my heart awoke. Ah, when next day you asked me to play at that game of flirtation before Miss Lushet, little you imagined how much your own I was, and how recklessly I would have dared anything to serve you."

"Passionate? Edith, who would have thought it? You who are wont to be so serene and gentle in your air!"

"We don't make faces, sir, but keep our secrets close in the casket of our heart till it becomes right to show them. Little you know us by head-mark! Look at Polly Grange. You think her the warmer-hearted sort of girl, perhaps. No doubt she has given all her heart to Mr. Eagle without a bit of disguise about the matter, and if he accept it her love will, I have no doubt, burn with a fine open glow all her life, and make him, good man, quite happy; but what is her love, compared to that which her sister Marian, for instance, will confess, when at length she loves? Little Marian, who says so little, and goes about so quietly, and is so blind to Wil-motte's tenderness for her,—a foolish weakness on his part. You don't know her, Archy, but I have guessed the jewel her heart is made of, and what will be the intensity of its light when in due time it becomes incandescent."

"Incandescent! That's a big word. You aston-

ish me, my pretty maid. You're half a-blaze yourself."

"Are you afraid of me, Captain Calvert?"

"I'm astonished, I said."

"Did I talk wildly, dear?"

"My dove! as if I didn't know all you were capable of before you spoke!"

"Oh, indeed! You have seen through me from the first!"

"I've a great mind to repeat it, Edy; but, in truth, you did come out just now in a new light. Women, and it seems girls too, are not to be seen through and through at a glance by mortal man."

"Well, dear, there is no saying what you may find me ere long.—There's my brother's laugh. How pleasant it is! He grows cheerful hour by hour."

"I once thought him glum and sour, Edith: but I like him now; and he seems not ill-disposed towards me?"

"I believe he thinks well of you. He bothered me about you on Friday night, indeed, when we were taking tea together in the parlour, but, I fancy, he just wanted to find out how much I cared for you. I don't feel much afraid to tell him what we've planned."

"I shouldn't mind getting it over before I go back to Ashcroft to-night."

"Ah, but I am not sure that it would be wise to tell him this evening, even after Mr. Eagle goes. I dare-say the two have been talking theology on the terrace ever since they began doing so at dinner; and even Angus might be a little shocked."

"What! to hear that we have been speaking so much of our dear selves on Sunday? I shouldn't be sur-

prised to hear that he has guessed everything. He saw us ramble off together from the garden after he had settled down on the terrace with Eagle, and it's not likely that he thinks we also are discussing Mr. Maurice's nonsense about 'everlasting' and 'eternal' not meaning even 'a long time.' Yes, I should like to get it over. You'll feel yourself more bound to me, maybe, if we have his sanction, and that sort of thing?"

"Bound! I shall not be bound till the day comes. No woman in her senses would permit such a thing. You have my regard; but I've given, and will give no binding promise."

"Was there ever such a plague! Haven't I promised?"

"I never asked you to do so; and I beg you won't promise, if that binds me."

"Then we aren't engaged, Edith!"

"Aren't we?"

"Of course not, if we are not promised to each other."

"But what's the good of promising?"

"Well, it sets one's mind at rest."

"How can it make any real difference, dear? If we go on liking, I suppose we'll be married on the day fixed, and if we don't go on liking you'll let me off, even at the last moment, won't you?"

"Not if I can avoid it."

"How! not even if I assure you that I'm tired of you?"

"I've no patience with you, Edy!"

"Poor dear!—Ah, there comes Duff. Good dog. Lie down. Now, sir, do you know who this is? May

I introduce the good friend whom you nearly killed with your pranks under the cliff, you rascal?"

"He tripped me up, or something, didn't he? Sly old Duffie, what were you after, eh?"

"He was very sorry, Archer, and ran home, ashamed of himself. He confessed his contrition to me when I arrived at the door with Marian. Didn't you, Duff? Indeed, he was so sorry that he couldn't wag his tail for a while. Don't you see that he still remembers all about it?"

"Yes; he looks distrustful, just as if afraid that I pat him sarcastically. Good dog."

"Ah, now he believes you've forgiven him. Pretty Duff. My brother's little boy, Ebon, is very fond of him, and when younger used to ride on his back."

"Ebon! He has gone to the west coast, they were saying."

"Yes; he went on Thursday, just a few hours before we met at Ashcroft, to visit his aunt, Miss Pentonville, who lives at Oden. I had a few lines from her last night announcing his safe arrival on Friday evening. He's a very gentle boy, but not shy, and his Aunt Lucy writes that he was making himself quite at home. You have happened to see little of him, owing to his having been generally out with his nurse Robina when you have called."

"I've had glimpses of him. A pretty child; like a miniature of his father. You scarcely knew his poor mother, Wilmotte has told me."

"I never saw her after her marriage-day. Angus took her to the Continent, and I was at school till she was hidden away in an asylum. It is thought now that she was not really out of her mind. It's a terribly sad

story altogether. I remember her appearance when she was married. I never saw any one more lovely. Poor Angus was in a dreadful way after her death ; but he says now that he knows for certain that she is in heaven, whereas for a time he had doubts of that, it seems. Fortunately his doubts, whatever the cause of them, were not so strong but that he could speak to Ebon as if he, at least, hoped that his dead mother was there."

"Some one's whistling, Edy, in the garden."

"My brother's signal. He must be wearying for us, and no wonder."

"Must we leave this mossy seat so soon ? How pleasant the twilight is still. The sun is only behind a cloud on the horizon, I could fancy."

"Oh, but we've been here, I am ashamed to think, how long."

"Darling, just one word more. You promise ?"

"Never. I am as free as the winds, and so are you."

"Dear Edith, but we are betrothed ?"

"Betrothed ? I don't know how far that goes, but it's a nice old-fashioned word."

"Then we'll use it, dear."

"Very good ; only it's not to mean that I've promised anything."

"But it is, Edith, to mean a notification to everybody concerned that you have chosen me, and are to be let alone in future."

"You do look so pale, Archer !"

"I don't doubt you, love. You like me, I know. The bother is, that you're such an awfully nice girl that other fellows will be snapping at you if they're not warned off."

"I rather like being 'snapped at,' and should I

happen to like the snapper, why, of course you will kindly get out of the way somehow."

"Trust me!"

"Thank you, sir."

"My queen, my star, my life!"

"Come, dear, Angus is shouting."

CHAPTER LII.

"HE has forgotten me."

"Not for an instant, Di. I questioned Ebon this evening, and again felt satisfied from his answers that often as Edith may have had Miss Grange at Beechworth, it is really a fact that Angus has spoken to her rarely. You have been frightened, dear, by idle kitchen gossip or gratuitous fancies of Robina."

Dina's Sunday had proved sad and tedious. She could not get out of her head what Ebon had said about Edith's scheme of finding for him a new mamma in the person of Marian Grange, and the lingering hours were spent in wearisome waiting for the post-bag, which on Sundays was seldom delivered till night-fall.

She had, indeed, attended the long service in Oden church with her little son and her sister, but it had never for a moment engaged her attention, and on her return to the cottage she hardly remembered where she had passed the forenoon.

Even her child's caresses—his half tender and half playful attempt to interest and rouse her—had little effect; and when, after stifling several yawns, the poor fellow confessed himself sleepy, she had kissed him in an absent way, and allowed his nurse to lead him off to bed before eight o'clock.

Since then another lingering hour had gone, and not yet had the post come in.

"Oh that he would come, Lucy!"

Lucy threw up the window sash that the mail-cart might be heard the moment it approached.

"'Tis there!" exclaimed her sister ere the balmy sea breeze had refreshed the room.

Dina sprang up as she spoke, and in her impatience would have rushed out, but Lucy caught her round the waist and held her fast.

"Elsa might wonder, dear."

Dina, too weak to resist, dropped her head on her sister's shoulder, and panted there breathlessly, so much did her heart palpitate.

Presently Elsa, the maid, entered and laid the post-bag on the table.

"Be sure, darling, that Edith's letter will confirm what I have been saying."

Dina seemed to have little hope that it would, but she sank quietly upon a sofa, and waited till Lucy opened the bag and came to her side with two letters.

The first she opened was dated Friday. It had been written by Edith Lockart soon after her return to Beechworth with her brother, and described, at considerable length, the Ashcroft breakfast party, and the subsequent luncheon in the hay-field near the lawn.

Lucy read it aloud, though that was scarcely of any use,—her sister's eyes running it over faster than her tongue could repeat its contents.

Dina's long fingers were clasped round Lucy's arm, and gradually as she read their clasp tightened until it inflicted severe pain upon the arm.

Lucy bore this without a murmur, for she was read-

ing of Marian Grange, and knew that her sister's misery found some relief in that merciless clasp.

Hitherto Miss Lockart had probably thought it inexpedient to write about her friend Marian. Certainly she had never described her to Miss Pentonville, and not a word had she said of her hope that by-and-by her correspondent's forlorn brother-in-law might be brought to think of marrying again. Now, however, she seemed to have much to say of Marian. She spoke of her beauty, of her dutifulness, and of the warmth of her affections. She spoke of her own strong attachment to her, of the readiness with which she inspired affection, of the homage rendered her by men whom she, Edith, could name,—a most unimpressible and unromantic physician, for example. Then, somewhat abruptly, she passed to a description of the luncheon party—of the six hay heaps, with a lady and gentleman seated on each, after the latter had helped the former to refreshments and provided themselves with the same; Angus alone excepted. He, on account of his rheumatic feet, had, she said, been obliged to be passive, and let Marian Grange undertake what it would have fallen to him to do had he been able. And this her sweet friend had done with the utmost grace and propriety. She was, indeed, the dearest little girl in the world, and Angus, without doubt, had discovered that she was so. He had talked to her evidently with the greatest interest and with obvious enjoyment. Since a sad sad time he had never looked happier, and after his return with her to Beechworth he had confessed that he looked forward with pleasure to meeting Marian again at the Dingle party. She, Edith, felt that something would come of this, and she hastened to assure dear Miss Pentonville

that the greatest good fortune that could befall Angus would be a union with a girl capable of loving him as little Marian would, if he asked her to do it.

Thus did the letter confirm Dina's worst apprehensions.

"Thank God, there is yet time!" said Lucy, crushing the creamy paper in her hand.

Dina's fingers had released their tenacious grip at last, and she leaned against her sister, moaning not nor trembling, but sick and inert.

Lucy herself, saddened to the heart's core, notwithstanding the thankfulness her words expressed, presently laid her cheek upon Dina's head, and comforted only with her silent sympathy.

Something slipped from her knee just then, and, glancing down, she saw the letter she had not yet read. Instantly it was in her hand and torn open.

This was the letter Lockait had written to his son on the terrace behind Beechworth house, after communicating to Edith the discoveries he had made regarding his wife's innocence; and along with it, in the same envelope, was the note in which Edith had attempted to explain in some degree to the boy the meaning of the passionate scrawl her brother was penning at her side.—Edith had despatched it on Thursday evening, but through the negligence of her messenger it had been posted too late for the west mail, and thus reached Oden along with her letter of Friday.

Miss Pentonville began with Edith's note,—Dina, altogether regardless of it, still resting heavily on her shoulder.

A rosy flush mantled on Lucy's face as she hurried over Edith's straight unblotted lines. Her heart beat

audibly. She stifled a cry of joy, and turning, threw her arms round her but half conscious sister and kissed her wildly.

Brought to life as it were by this, Dina opened her eyes in vague surprise. Then her glance fell upon Edith's letter, which was presently held open before her, and half consciously she read.

Edith stated in simple terms, such as a young child might understand, that Ebon's father had been unhappy about fibs people had told regarding Dina, his dear, dear little boy's mother; and that having unexpectedly obtained complete proof that all those fibs were fibs indeed, he, Ebon's father, was very, very happy, and desirous that his son should rejoice with him, thanking God that his dear mother was certainly in heaven.

Slowly at first Dina took in the meaning of this; and then, at length, the blood bounded in her veins, and she grasped her husband's letter and devoured it with hungry eyes.

It was a rhapsody—nothing more. It entered into no details or explanations, but it sufficed to prove, beyond all question, that Lockart's suspicions and doubts regarding his wife's integrity had vanished utterly, and that in a holy rapture of joy he recognised her innocence, and adored her memory—the memory of his one beloved, his never-to-be forgotten.

The letter finished, Dina looked into her sister's face. Its expression sufficiently proved that she had truly gathered the meaning of what she had read. Overcome by happiness, even more than she had been overcome by misery, again she fell upon Lucy's shoulder this time, sobbing there as if her heart would break.

Long she wept; her loving companion leaving her

undisturbed. At last by degrees she became calm, and in silence seemed to rest.

Great was her need of rest, but not many minutes had passed ere suddenly she started up with flashing eyes, and clasping her hands behind her sister's neck, exclaimed,—

“Now he may know his mother! Now I may tell him, Lucy?”

Lucy parted the fair young mother's hair from her brow, kissed her softly, and whispered,—

“I think so, dear.”

The next moment Dina had left the room, and was flying up the cottage stair.

“Poor child,” murmured Miss Pentonville to herself, when her sister had left her in the parlour alone, “not the less may Angus be thinking of Marian Grange. Somehow he has learned that his wife was never the bad one he dared to suppose her, and naturally he is overjoyed, for deeply he loved her; but this discovery has not brought her to life again, and need not necessarily make him faithful to her ashes. Her supposed sin has for years rested heavily on his soul. That weight is removed; and though remorse for his mad credulity may torture him, such, evidently, is the joy with which he hails the news of Dina's innocence, the world must seem to him to be lit by a new sun. It was the day after he wrote that ecstatic letter to his boy that, in high spirits apparently, he visited Ashcroft, and entered with zest into the amusements there. Everything was found *coulour de rose* probably. It was just the moment when a pretty and sympathizing young girl such as this Marian Grange would be most likely to interest him. Her winning ways and soft eyes, accord-

ing with his new-found sense of blissfulness, would inevitably beguile him from futile dreams of the long-lost. My poor Di ! what if at the Dingle party yesterday he yielded to the charm, and found that all his wounds might be healed by Marian's lips ? I will not think it ; impetuous he always was, but when rest and night followed his unwonted gaiety, he would have leisure to consider—to distinguish between such true love as that of which his letter is another proof, and the merely pleasurable sensation of being sympathized with by a simple girl at a moment when his heart had suddenly been quickened by unlooked-for news. I won't believe him so hasty ; he cannot have spoken to her yet. Nor will any new face blind him to beauty such as my sister's still is."

Dina meanwhile had reached Ebon's room. What she had proposed to say to her child cannot easily be told. Her heart was full to bursting, and passionate, wild words, such as mothers speak, but the passionless pen refuses to write, were ready to flow from her quivering lips. There, however, they were arrested, when her eyes fell upon her boy's placid face, and she saw that he was sound asleep.

Could she awaken him, her tired darling ? Fast as her heart throbbed in her eager impatience, she had sense enough to withhold her hands and let him rest.

At first he had appeared little fatigued by his journey from Glasgow on Friday, but on Sunday it had begun to tell upon him, and evidently he was very weary when taken to bed, though his poor mother had been herself too listless then to think much of it. Now Dina remembered his yawns, and her heart smote her as she thought how nearly she had disturbed his sweet sleep.

With bated breath she watched him. Had he shown the least symptom of being anything but very sound asleep, she could not have resisted her longing to clasp him in her arms, and pour into his ears then and there all that she had to say to him. But he neither moved nor sighed. He was quite still, and his soft, regular breathing proved him to be enjoying the most healthful and restful slumber.

That fond mother dared not disturb him. So long had she been deprived of her child, a child was almost a new thing to her, a blessing but half understood. Under other circumstances, she might have roused the boy unhesitatingly, trusting to lulling and singing him to sleep again as soon as her tale was told, but as it was, Ebon's sleep seemed to her a holy thing, a gift of heaven with which it would be wicked to interfere. She must be patient; she must wait, and not till at length he should be refreshed, would it be right to disturb him by even the softest word.

Silently sank Dina on her knees beside the little bed, and found some relief in pouring out to her Father above her fervent tribute of thanksgiving, mingled with heartfelt petitions that He who ruleth everywhere would continue to bless and strengthen her dear ones.

By-and-by she rose and earnestly gazed at the boy again. As calmly as ever he breathed, and not yet could the gentle girl find it in her heart to deprive him of one instant's rest merely to gratify her own yearning soul. Slowly and softly she moved a stool to the bedside, and sitting down, leant her head upon the end of the pillow without stirring it. There she would watch.

But Dina was already exhausted by the trials of that day, and while she watched, she herself sank to sleep.

CHAPTER LIII.

"MONDAY, Edith. I suppose you gave all your orders last week for your party to-day," said Lockart, as he chipped the shell of a raw egg, and emptied it into his breakfast-cup of cocoa.

"Yes, dear," replied his sister, who preferred to have her egg boiled, and was busy eating it with a mother-of-pearl spoon ; and I am so glad you ask. It looks as if you were going to take some interest in it after all. You may remember that you wouldn't even answer my invitation to join my friends on the hill."

"Wouldn't I ? Well, I'm in a better temper now, and accept cordially. When did you send the invitations ? Only last Wednesday ? It seems to me that I have lived half a lifetime since then ; so many things have happened to me ; such an indescribable change has taken place in my feelings. A wretched misanthrope scarcely a week ago ; to-day, not without some resemblance to the less irrational of my fellow-creatures, I hope."

"You look much better, Angus : not nearly so pallid, and with eyes not half so mournful, though as dark and sombre-hued as ever."

"And you, Edy, did you recognise your face in your dressing-glass this morning ? Why, my dear, it is like

a lyric, and it amazes me that I don't *hear* it. All the features seem 'a singing' and making melody together."

Edith blushed, and hid her happy face behind her cup, conscious that it expressed more than she was willing to let her lips declare.

"Perhaps you don't know, my pet," Angus went on in his provoking way, "that it is not proper, or at least usual, for young ladies to look happy when they are engaged. From gay and thoughtless girls they suddenly change to grave and rather sad little women : life wearing to them all at once a new and serious aspect, in which they have not seen it before. Anticipations of cares, trials, and bereavements fill their innocent minds, and—"

Edith looked grave enough now, and detecting a haze of moisture on her eyes, Angus stopped his speech abruptly. After a pause, he resumed in a different tone,—

"Your pardon, Edith. You were quiet and thoughtful before this happened, well may your heart have its song now ; and glad I am to see it dancing in your eyes. You know how much I like that honest fellow who has robbed me of you."

Edith, a tear glittering on her eyelash, left her seat quickly, and throwing her arms round her brother's neck, laid her face upon his cheek. Angus let her rest there for a minute, patted her fair head, and then said with a chuckle, "Your greedy sleeve is sucking up my cocoa." Whereupon Edith jumped away with a laugh, and resumed her breakfast,—the lyrical face brighter than ever.

The conscious couple, Edith and Archer, had waited on Sunday evening till Mr. Eagle took his leave,

and had then confessed themselves to Angus. Archer bravely took the lead, and frankly told Lockart how rapturously he had admired and liked his sister from the first, and how immeasurably his affection and admiration had deepened since. He spoke well, and with so much single-hearted enthusiasm, that Angus, who had already conceived a liking for him, grasped his hand with unwonted fervour and bade him say no more.

The three then talked for a long time on the terrace, where Angus had spent the evening with Eagle, and parted only when the shades of night began to gather among the trees behind them.

Calvert, tingling to his toes with gratification and delight, strode back to Ashcroft by the hill and field-path with a step so elastic, and a bearing so airy, that no one who had known him only a year earlier as a shattered invalid could easily have recognised him.

As for Edith, she was not less happy, though, perhaps, less gay than Archer, when that evening she retired to her chamber, where, ere she fell asleep, she spent a full hour in thought and prayer. In the morning she awoke refreshed, and came down to breakfast with the beaming countenance, upon which her brother complimented her.

“ Well, Angus dear,” said the happy girl, who had too much of her lover’s openheartedness to dream of hiding her joy, “ I shall hope to quiz you in my turn ere long. Perhaps my little Marian will prove as eloquent to-day as you told us you found her after the Dingle dance.”

“ Foolish Edy,” replied Angus, smiling kindly, “ how badly you manœuvre ! You ought not to show your hand in that way. Telling me your game, how can you expect to win ? You ought to have abused your little

friend to me, shown yourself jealous of her, and roused my interest in her by a great show of keeping her out of my way. By some such means you might have made me curious about her, and eager to seize every chance of seeing her. As it is, you have put me on my guard against your plot, and enlisted my vanity against it; for no man likes to find himself netted by artful women, or tricked into matrimony."

"How you contradict yourself, Angus!" cried Edith triumphantly. "You had just said that I was frank and open, showing my hand, and making no attempt to trick you artfully into liking Marian."

Angus smiled.

"Your proceedings, dear," he said after a pause, "had the appearance of an ill-disguised plot. It seemed, through want of skill, that you showed your hand. Seriously, Edy, I knew you were too straightforward to resort to artifices; and your frank recommendation of Miss Grange has not prejudiced me against her any more than her own behaviour, which has been quite simple and natural."

"I'm very glad, Angus."

"I won't forbid you to be so, dear, but I must say, frankly, since the subject is to be quite an open one between us, that it cannot be suddenly or very soon that I shall become satisfied with your gentle and intelligent little friend. She is very good and quiet, and, indeed, I like her greatly better than any other girl you have had here, but with my mind so occupied as it is with the remembrance of one with whom Miss Grange can in no respect be compared, I cannot all at once feel towards her quite as you wish."

"But, Angus dear, I'm not so blindly devoted to little

Mar as to wish you to fancy her if she falls so far short of your ideal as you hint. I am willing to believe that poor Dina was everything you now imagine her, and perhaps there's some one still to be found in the world more nearly her equal than my pretty friend, who, I know very well, is, in truth, not a second Dina, though, in her own style, as nice a girl as one could wish to see."

"I think she is, Edy. Yes, yes, I'm not complaining of her. All I say is, give me time. By-and-by her peculiarities may be as dear to me as those which characterized that other, with whom I now know that I had every reason to feel entirely blest."

"But Angus, dear, you can fancy how sorry I shall be should you let her become attached to you, and then find that time won't reconcile you to her so much as you seem to expect it to do. I think that, for her sake, I ought, perhaps, to withdraw her in the meanwhile. It will be time enough for you to see more of her when your heart is less engaged by pleasant and sad memories. It will be right, dear, to keep poor Marian away from you to-day ; there are several gentlemen coming to my pic-nic who will be only too happy to spend the whole afternoon with her."

"There's my clever sister ! How quickly she learns ! No, no, Edy, I really am very much pleased with Miss Grange, and should it be possible to interest her in me, I shall be glad. I don't need to be tantalized, and I beg you'll leave those 'several gentlemen' to select partners for themselves. Remember, dear, that a lame fellow is at a great disadvantage at any rate. There, you see my game, at least, is quite aboveboard !"

"Well, brother mine, I only bid you avoid being

cruel to my friend, who has more heart to break than many another girl. I must see now if the dishes have been properly prepared. Cook was to leave them all ready on Saturday night, so that they might be quite cold by to-day. The jellies might not have had time to firm had they been boiled this morning."

"Away with you, dear; I know nothing of jellies but their taste."

Edith now glided off, bent upon overhauling the housekeeper's arrangements for the cold luncheon, which she had determined should be partaken of on the top of Craigie hill or in Craigie wood—both just at the back of Beechworth—as the weather might dictate.

"They are very nice children, my pretty Edith and her clear-eyed lover," soliloquized Angus when alone, "and I don't think I ever saw a better-matched pair. I like his frank, ingenuous look, and could well believe him to be as guileless as herself. And now, as for this Marian Grange, I really like her, and, should she like me in return, I hope and believe that I shall not turn so wayward and weak as to be the occasion of any disappointment to her. Could I anticipate such a thing, most assuredly I would shrink from exchanging another syllable with her."

CHAPTER LIV.

"ANNETTE has not died, I trust, since her sick-bed statement to the cousin of old Hugh's daughter, of which you told me at Ashcroft on Friday?" said Lockart, who sat at the foot of a tree in Craigie wood engaged in the consumption of one of those jellies, the proper manner of preparing which he had declined to discuss with his sister while at breakfast.

"She recovered, and is now quite well, I believe," replied Dr. Wilmotte, perched on a stone near his patient, and munching a tongue sandwich. "As, however, she expected to die, her words had all the force of a death-bed confession. I have now heard the circumstances under which it was made direct from Martha, who at present is table-maid to Mrs. Lambert, a friend of the Melvilles, and, indeed, of your sister's also. The report I gave you on Hugh's authority, of what Martha had heard from her friend, was tolerably correct; and perhaps the only thing I need mention is, that Annette declared distinctly to her cousin that, so far from telling Vidocq any story to the prejudice of Lady Lockart, she had not even exchanged a word with him on any such matter at the time you sent for and violently turned her out of the house, without listening to what she had to say in her defence."

"I was a fool just then—mad ! There can be no doubt of that. But, unpardonable as my behaviour was, I do not know that Annette's shines greatly by comparison with it. I am far from satisfied with her. Might not she have had the goodness to speak ere this ? To expose Vidocq, while yet his exposure could benefit her mistress ? She might have come to me next day, expecting to find me in a better temper, or she might have sent a letter after us when we left Brussels, and so have saved us all a world of misery."

"As to that, Sir Angus, she asserts, I understand, that at first she was too indignant to vindicate herself, and that having remained in Belgium until shortly before her recent illness, she only quite lately heard of the sad results of Vidocq's slanderous tale about herself and Lady Lockart."

"Well, well, let us believe her. Did you ascertain her present whereabouts ?"

"Martha undertook to discover with whom she is, when I suggested that it might be desirable to question her."

"Very good ; then there is a fair prospect of our being able to confront Vidocq with the maid. Yes, we shall shortly have our proofs collected, and hem the villain in effectually. Meanwhile, I find it necessary to put him at his ease. The other night—the evening of the day we breakfasted and lunched with the Granges—I had a long talk with him about the probable origin of the horrible tale of which we have now every reason to believe him the sole inventor. He was bathing my feet at the time, and his manner and look confirmed my belief in his guilt. Unfortunately my manner of treating the subject awakened, I fear, his suspicions. I

intended to lull him into a false security whilst our inquiries were a-foot, but he was, it would seem, too shrewd for me, and took the alarm. At least there has been a marked change in his manner ever since. He is no longer ready and easy, but, on the contrary, nervous and awkward. I am, therefore, careful to avoid the topic altogether, or to allude to it only in the most casual and indifferent way—such a hypocrite he has forced me to become."

"One must tread warily on thin ice."

"Of course. It seems, however, that in spite of all my precautions the subject is never out of his mind. A word or tone suggestive of the story, or anything bearing on it, suffices to make him grow pale, and to make his evil eyes lower with mingled fear and vindictiveness. In short, he is, I suspect, already suffering those terrors and tortures with which I determined, and am resolved, to visit him, on obtaining a confirmation of his villainy from Annette's lips. This morning, while he was again engaged about my unlucky feet, I happened, quite thoughtlessly, in complimenting him upon his deftness, to allude to his having somewhat scalded my feet on Friday night, when he was, as I believe, nervous about my project of revenging my wife's wrongs, and positively he grew suddenly so livid and sick-looking that I half expected him to faint. He's a base coward, I fear. No doubt he thought I was sarcastically alluding to the unsteadiness of his hand on that occasion as an evidence of his guilty dread of my vengeance."

"Probably. I have often suspected him of being a sneak. When I arrived a little ago, it struck me that he was looking horribly cut up, broad as his smile of welcome was."

"He's not very fond of you, Doctor. He suspects you of undermining his influence over me. But another proof I have had to-day of his trepidation. Passing his room door, I, slowly limping along the passage, remarked, for his door was a little ajar, that the rascal's boxes were corded, as if packed for a journey. I had often seen them before in passing, and so was certain that the cording was something unusual and new. The truth is, the fellow, I fear, is so thoroughly frightened, that he is holding himself in readiness to bolt. Now, we must not encourage him to do that. It would put me out dreadfully. I should lose—for it would be hard to catch him—the gratification of personally peeling and salting him, and he would, I fear, altogether escape the punishment he so richly deserves. I would fain get him into a net, so that the ministers of justice might be introduced to him leisurely."

"I am afraid, Sir Angus, that your feelings—"

"I quite understand, Doctor. You think me savagely vindictive. I am; but what crime ever equalled Vidocq's, and can you honestly say that I should let him off?"

"No, but—"

"Then help me by every means to secure him, Wil-motte. Let him not escape. Be wary, subtle as himself, and then—"

"Pardon me, this excitement is highly injurious, and permit me to hint that the subject that has given rise to it is rather out of place here. Look at the happy faces near us. Miss Edith's fair guests should inspire pleasanter thoughts."

"That's very true, but the moments are precious, and should that—"

" My dear Sir Angus, as your physician, I shall have to feel your pulse if you go on at this rate."

" You're a good fellow, Doctor. I'm calm. Those girls are worth looking at, as you hint."

" Their summer dresses show their complexions to advantage."

" Yes ; the reflected lights soften the harshest features. Edith, in her soft-textured blue silk, is not the least interesting, I flatter myself."

" A lovely girl. I have always thought her so. My friend, Archer Calvert, seems to be paying her marked homage."

" Ha, ha ! it is too late to discuss his character with you, Wilmotte. I suppose it need be no secret that he has asked and been accepted by her, with my sanction."

" Indeed ! I had no idea that things had gone so far. Why, it is but a few days since he spoke as if he had not a chance of her, and it was only last Friday that he, in his open way, for the first time expressed some hope of being taken into favour."

" He did not rashly count on her consent, you say ? I am glad of that. The less he hoped the more he reverenced her ; that is an axiom, isn't it ?"

" Well, Sir Angus, I shall most heartily congratulate my friend, and I do not think I need hesitate to congratulate you also, so well I know how right-minded and honest he is. Hallo ! what possesses our little Mary Melville ? she is bounding over the rocks towards us like a chamois."

Edith's friends--for this was her Monday party--were scattered over the rough hill-side, where the trees of Craigie wood are most sparsely set, and Mary Mel-

ville was coming from one of the groups farthest from Sir Angus and the Doctor. Holding up her light dress, she leaped with astonishing agility from rock to rock, and in a few seconds alit, so to speak, at Wilmotte's side, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Has he told you yet?" she cried, clasping the Doctor's arm, and indicating Lockart by a motion of her head.

"Told me what, Miss Mary?"

"Oh, then, he hasn't. I'm so glad! Come with me, and I'll tell you myself. I was so astonished and delighted—that is, interested—and you'll be beside yourself with surprise," said the fairy girl, hurrying Ellis off to an unoccupied bracken-green knoll under some fir trees.

"Well, dear Mary, has Grant taken Richmond, the Danish war broken out afresh, or Dhuleep Singh's fair young Maharanee promised you a visit this autumn?"

"Pooh, Grant, Danes! who cares? Do listen. Only fancy. Could you have guessed it? Edith and Archer are *already* engaged!!!"

"Is that all? Bah! I've known it this three—"

"You, indeed! what a fib! Didn't you say that Sir Angus hadn't told you?"

"Not I; he told me ever so many minutes before you dropped between us."

"Ah, well, I've had a good run for nothing. But aren't you surprised, Ellis? You've the most dreadfully aggravating coolness sometimes. I could hardly stop to congratulate Edith, I was so eager to be the first to tell you. Now, didn't you, at any rate, feel astonished when her brother had the luck to tell you? I'm sure you did. You couldn't have had an idea that Archer

would ask her yesterday after dinner, and while Mr. Eagle was conversing with Sir Angus ? ”

“ It was most natural to take such a good opportunity.”

“ Nonsense. How could you think that he would have the courage to shake himself free of Bracy Lushet so suddenly ? You might be more amiable, Ellis. You *were* surprised, weren’t you, now ? ”

“ I was, indeed, pretty one ; and had expressed my surprise to Lockart ;—there ! ”

“ Ha, ha ! I was sure of it. Such fun ! But, do you know, I am not altogether happy about it. I used to be very fond of Archer, and I think it cruel in him to desert me entirely for either Bracy or Edith, neither of whom is so very much prettier than I am. Edith at least isn’t, is she ? ”

“ Miss Lockart is a very pretty girl.”

“ What ! you don’t mean by that, Dr. Wilmotte, that she *is* prettier than me ? ”

“ You’re a nice-looking girl too, Mary.”

“ I know that, of course ; but is Edith much better-looking ? Her nose, now, is it neater than mine ? ”

“ No ; not neater.”

“ Is her chin rounder or nicer ? ”

“ Not rounder or nicer.”

“ Has she redder lips, or whiter teeth ? ”

“ I can’t say she has.”

“ Or sunnier hair ? ”

“ Far from it.”

“ Has she brighter eyes ? ”

“ Not brighter, that would be impossible.”

“ What then,—bluer ? ”

“ Yes ; bluer.”

" And what of that, pray ? "

" Oh nothing, maybe."

" Maybe ! Can't you speak out, sir ? Are blue eyes to be preferred to green ones such as mine ? "

" It is just possible that Archer may have a fancy for blue eyes."

" Then it is probably because hers are blue that he has gone over to Edith. Oh that I had blue eyes ; blue, blue eyes ! But tell me, do you yourself admire green eyes ? "

" Dear Mary, your eyes are olive."

" Oh, very good ; you don't like to give them their proper name. That is, you'd rather not think them green. How lucky I refused you at the Dingle on Saturday ! Indeed, what a fool I'd have been had I encouraged you, just after you'd been crazy about Marian, who has violet-grey eyes, as unlike mine as possible."

" Dearest ! Did you refuse me ? Come, you were joking, and ran off with the moss wreath on your brow, leaving me disconsolate among the larch trees, just in fun, didn't you ? I had fancied myself attached to your cousin, but even on Saturday I was well aware that I had spent pleasanter hours in your than in her company. My devotion to her was the mere fruit of imagination ; my feelings had really been most touched by your dear ways. Believe me, sweet May, you've not been out of my thoughts for an hour since we parted."

" My good Dr. Wilmotte, no man shall ever win this hand who is not prepared to assure me that he heartily likes every atom of me, and idolizes my very finger tips."

" I think, Mary, more of expression in eyes than of colour."

"Ha, I knew you'd be too honest to say you liked green eyes. You would have praised the sweet violet of Marian's had you won her. Such a pity it is you didn't!"

"I valued their soft and dreamful expression more than their slaty hue."

"And do you find mine soft and dreamful?"

"How truly you said, dear Mary, that you'd delight in badgering me! Do so, little tyrant; I'm only too happy to place myself at your disposal on the terms you once suggested."

"Ho, Ellis! you defy me to find a tender place in your nice tough skin? We'll see. Suppose Marian were to turn out to care nothing for Sir Angus, but to be evidently pining for the affection you once appeared to offer her, you would still be true to me?"

"My love!"

"Answer me, Doctor. What if I proved to you that it was through maidenly reserve that Marian took pains to make you think her indifferent to you—you not having told your love?"

"Prove it, dear."

"As I expected, you won't answer. Thus I may judge, sir, of the kind of devotion you offer."

"Little Mary, every syllable you utter endears you to me. Looking at Marian there—you see she is now in close conversation with Lockart—and then looking at you, I—"

"Oh, to be sure; rather prefer me in the circumstances? That at least is credible."

"Mary!"

"I can't help it, Dr. Wilmotte. You have brought this upon yourself. I pardoned your untimely court-

ship on Saturday because it was playfully set agoing by myself, and evidently but half serious on your part. But to-day you are grave and in earnest, and seem to expect me actually to accept you forthwith, and that while you know I cannot doubt that you in your heart of hearts prefer my cousin. You are so silly as to think that I shall contentedly slip into her place merely because she has declined it, and you have so little tact as to ask me to do so within a few hours of her having let you know her decision."

" You are hard upon me. It would be rash to say what I might do were Marian within my reach. I cannot affect to admire her less than I did. The discovery I have made is, that I love you, Mary ; and my true belief is that the remembrance of all that Marian was and is will not interfere with the deep-seated feeling which makes me yours."

" Oh dear ! of such stuff are men ! Ah me, ever since I was quite a young girl I have fondly thought how glorious a thing it would be to receive the homage of some man whom I could admire—as, for instance, I, in fact, admired dark-browed Ellis Wilmotte—and now all my fair dream is swept rudely away by the folly of one of those who inspired it. You say I am hard upon you, but think how hard upon me it is to have the romance and poetry of life blotted out at seventeen. Think what I must suffer in seeing you so degrade yourself, and in feeling obliged to tear you from a heart still sore from recent wounds. Have I deserved this ? Did I not with pure magnanimity aim at aiding you to win my cousin, even while I suspected that she but faintly returned your love, and while I was not without some consciousness of being better able to appreciate you myself ?

What ! you ask me to commit my happiness to your keeping, while yet you cannot feel assured that you would not even now be overjoyed were Marian Grange to confess herself touched by your long, though silent suit. Ah, Ellis, my broken idol, to whom shall I now give credit for common sense ?"

" My sweet ranter ! this is your way of saying ' Yes,' is it ? I might have known that you'd hit on an original plan."

" Pardon me, Dr. Wilmotte, you flatter yourself exceedingly. I decline your generous offer. I have confessed to having had some tenderness for you, and had you shown a marked disposition to win my good-will before it became obvious that you could not get Marian, I might have looked upon your advances with a certain favour. As it is, I have sufficiently shown you that I distrust a man who can so lightly play fast and loose with his affections. Men at least ought to be steadfast. You are answered, sir."

" Am I ? How deliciously your voice twitters, how sweet a wit is in your gay green eyes, and what a beaming little sprite you are, my Mary !"

" You are intolerable to-day, Ellis ! Will nothing abash you ? I declare that but for the people there I could almost kiss you out of pure vexation.—Ah, there's Marian at liberty, I'll have a word with her while my uncle is engaging Sir Angus."

Mr. Grange had joined Sir Angus, and his elder daughter, who had been conversing with the latter, was thus in a manner set free.

Mary, anxious to speak to her, left Wilmotte abruptly, and throwing her arms round Marian's waist led her aside.

"Mar," she whispered, "I have something to ask you. Are you, dear, very much in love with Ellis Wilmotte?"

Marian looked at her impetuous little cousin with an amused smile, and waited for some explanation.

"You don't think I've a right to know?" continued Mary; "I have though. Ellis has imagined himself attached to you, and he feels so still, but thinking it useless to ask you, seeing that you don't seem to care for him in the way he wishes, he is 'courting' me instead! Now, I want to know if it would be safe to accept his offer, which isn't worth a pin if he, after all, has a chance of getting you?"

Quiet Marian laughed mirthfully, and taking off her cousin's wide-awake let the sunshine make a nimbus of her golden hair.

"I don't think you could do better than accept, dear, if he likes you enough, and you really and truly love him," she said. "He is good and well-meaning, very honourable, and very kind-hearted. Almost worthy, indeed, of even my little cousin."

"Oh, you needn't patronize me, Mar; I'm grown up. I just want to know if you love, or have ever loved Ellis."

"I never have, Mary; nor did I guess till the other day that he thought at all of me in that way. As soon as I suspected it I took pains to let him see that I had only friendly feelings towards him."

"Very good; now, come and tell him that."

"Mary, dear!"

"Nonsense, Mar, you must come.—Ellis!"

Wilmotte hearing himself called, joined the cousins in the ferny brake where they stood together.

"Now, Mar," cried Mary earnestly, "tell him."

Miss Grange, blushing and perplexed, hung back, and the Doctor, not knowing what Mary wished, stood looking from one to the other.

"What is Miss Marian to tell me, I wonder?"

"Go on, Marian," urged the sunny-haired.

At length Marian, set at ease by a growing sense of amusement, took one of Wilmotte's hands in hers, and said, with a smile on her lips, and a somewhat compassionate look in her sweet eyes,—

"Mary wishes me to tell you in words what you must already know very well. She is very fond of you, and—"

"My goodness, Mar, that isn't it. What do you mean?" cried Mary; pressing her hands on Marian's mouth to stop her speech. "You're to tell him that you never cared a fig for him."

"Long as we have known each other, Marian, you do not love me?" said Wilmotte with honest gravity.

"No, Ellis; except as a dear friend."

"That will do. Had I not despaired of success I should have asked you months ago, for I thought I liked you more than I liked Mary, and, indeed, with all my heart. This explanation will not estrange you and me, and it satisfies Mary, who is dear to both of us."

"Thank you, sweetest coz. I'll never feel uneasy about you again. I'll run no risk of vexing you should I ever be kind to Ellis. That's well. As for him, he may wait. Should he by a life of patient devotion prove that I have become all in all to him, the day may perchance arrive when I shall feel able to pity him. Meanwhile he is dismissed, and recommended to repent

of his folly, to learn to know himself, and to endeavour better to understand his own feelings and tendencies.—Let us now plague Edith, whom I let off too cheaply a little ago. Dr. Wilmotte, Miss Lushet seems to be disengaged at this moment. Having lost Captain Calvert, she may be not indisposed to take up with you. May sympathy unite you! Good-bye."

Mary was fond of Wilmotte, and fully intended to marry him in the course of time.

As for the worthy young doctor himself, he took his snubbing very quietly—thinking the pleasure Mary took in inflicting it a good sign, and too much subdued by consciousness of the vacillating part he had played throughout to be exacting. His suit had been hastily begun, and knowing well that Mary had had no opportunity of anticipating it, it did not displease him that she showed a disposition to let his feelings and her own mature.

Never imagining that the humble-minded lover of her cousin would think of herself, Mary had lately indulged in an idle fancy that she liked Mr. Eagle fully better. Archer Calvert, too, had once—but I do not propose to enumerate those to whom she had felt partial in her brief career. She had always been readily touched by kindness and admiration. Who isn't? English girls need not be supposed to hold their affections wholly in reserve till the great day when their hands are formally asked and conceded. Just as the youth is in ecstasies about his last pretty partner, and dreams of her till—he forgets her in the light of another's eyes, the maiden is in a flutter about the pleasant fellow who last distinguished her, and remembers him

until—she can better herself ; but when at length the fated one arrives, serene he enters into possession of a heart not the less entirely his own because ere it went over to him its beat had quickened from time to time beneath the admiring gaze of earlier friends.

CHAPTER LV.

THE Craigiewood party, so eagerly looked forward to by Archer Calvert, before he had the slightest anticipation of the footing on which he was destined to stand with its fair hostess, proved a decided success.

The atmosphere was fresh and bright, and the views were extensive : to the east, sunlit spires and towers, lightly canopied by smoke ; the Lion of the capital, shadowy and grey, and undemeaned by obelisk or fane ; North Berwick's cone, pointed by a gleam shot athwart some drifting cloud ; and, yet farther off, the Isle of May, a streak and speck upon the ocean's edge ; across the whole north the unambitious hills of Fife, with here and there a misty Grampian peak above their woods and fertile slopes, and along their sea-line gleaming towns, alternated with belts of yellow sand and bars of rugged rock, between which and its hither shore the Forth, isle-dotted, specked with sails, and very blue beneath an azure sky ; westward, a rich alluvial land, framed by Corstorphine and the Pentlands, and spreading forth towards the mountains of Argyle.

Scattered about the rough hill-side a goodly company, shaded when they chose by trees of various kinds, sparse-foliaged and dense, found seats to suit their moods and ages,—rock stools, moss couches, and, where

a recent gale had stretched some pines upon the ground, tree benches.

Lockart, unable to walk to the rendezvous, had climbed to it on Edith's grey pony. Wilmotte joined him almost as soon as he dismounted, and then took place those conversations already set forth.

Mr. Grange and Lockart, when Miss Melville had carried off Marian to testify personally to her want of vital interest in Wilmotte, engaged in an animated criticism of *Enoch Arden*,—one of the most recent additions to their book tables,—Sir Angus preferring it on account of its intenser human interest to the Legends of King Arthur and his Table Round ; Mr. Grange maintaining that a sublimer eloquence and greater depth of pathos had been reached in the concluding pages of the latter.

Major Melville had looked somewhat annoyed while his cousin, Marian Grange, was in close conversation with Sir Angus, and then monopolized for a while by his other cousin Mary and Dr. Wilmotte. Seeing her at length set free, he joined her, led her apart to an unoccupied bank, supplied her with jellies and cream, and scolded her for flirting with Lockart. She thanked him for his attentions, laughed at his ill-humour, and declared that, having been in the way of seeing him somewhere nearly every afternoon since his leave began, she had not fancied he could be very impatient to talk to her to-day, whereupon the youthful major twisted his moustaches grimly, and vowed that though Miss Lockart had got together a choice enough party, he, for his part, thought, by Jove, that she, Marian, was the only girl of the lot who was worth talking to—a speech which Marian found even more amusing than his ill-

humour, and at which she laughed again till the young fellow's downy, bronzed cheeks reddened, and he half suspected himself of having said something foolish.

Sir Angus, while heartily applauding poor Enoch's self-abnegation, watched the Major jealously, and presently telegraphing Edith to his side, asked that dutiful sister to remind Miss Grange at the first opportunity that his conversation with her had been interrupted, and that he hoped she would, when at leisure, return to him, as he could not go to her.

Edith, greatly delighted, promised compliance, and then remembering that she had engaged Marian to spend the night at Beechworth, thought it as well to mention this fact to her brother, who, at once understanding that he had thus a prospect of having Marian pretty much to himself during the evening, with a ready smile declared himself satisfied, and no longer anxious to have her immediately at his side. Miss Lushet would suffice in the meantime, he added, observing that lady not far off.

Frederick Evans, who was of the party, politically avoiding her, Bracy was quite happy to chat with Sir Angus, and at Edith's suggestion readily seated herself beside him on an eligible rock.

Her skirts were very ample, and covered a vast deal of ground. The bonnet she wore was, as usual, lofty fronted, and over her forehead was fixed her favourite damask rose. Her sultry cheeks were in full bloom, and her fan played before them incessantly. The fine brown eyes we have so often seen were beautifully liquid, and Lockart acknowledged to himself the sweetness and warmth of their expression. Her handsome features were as imposing and her air as superb as ever.

Archer happening to pass alone, she arrested him by a tap of her fan, condescended to inquire about his injured ankle, and then in cordial and affectionate terms congratulated him on his most happy "engagement" to Miss Lockart, stated that she, Bracy, already admired and liked that young lady exceedingly, and that she believed confidently that he had every prospect of perfect happiness with her. Archer thanked her sincerely, though with somewhat tremulous lips, for her compliments and good wishes, and then bowed himself away rather hurriedly, as if apprehensive that, after all, he might not even yet have fairly got out of "Bracy's clutches."

When he had rejoined Edith at a distance, Miss Lushet talked of him to Sir Angus, and expatiated at large on his humility and amiability as a man, and his energy and courage as a soldier. She dwelt upon the pity with which she had often thought of the many years of suffering he had endured after his return in a sadly injured state from Lucknow, explained how rash and self-forgetful he was, and how anxious she had often been on his account when seeing him exposing himself to fatigue before he had perfectly recovered his strength, and, in fact, so spoke as thoroughly to convince Lockart that, young as she was, she had felt it incumbent upon her to take quite a motherly charge of the wounded hero of the counter-mine, that her proceedings had from the first been disinterested, and that her feelings had throughout been purely friendly and guileless.

Much amused by her frankness, Angus gave her a good deal of his attention, until at length, missing Lemon Melville and Miss Grange, he, almost forgetting

his companion, began to growl in his heart at his unfortunate inability to walk freely.

Miss Lushet never talked to stocks or stones, and so, seeing by-and-by that her hitherto interested auditor had become absent, she turned to where Evans was jesting with some merry girls, and commanded his attendance with her expressive eyes.

Obedient, the witty young counsellor in a few seconds bent before her, and she, bowing with a bland and slightly compassionate smile to Sir Angus, moved away ere the latter had quite realized the fact that he had probably allowed her to speak for some minutes to inattentive ears.

Roused from his reverie by the lady's apparently abrupt, though really calm and stately exit, Angus raised his hat hastily, and then smiled as he looked after the retreating pair, and remarked how admirably matched they seemed.

But he was permitted no leisure to speculate about them, several of his sister's guests hastening to converse with him the moment he was disengaged.

Major Melville and Marian, whose disappearance had disturbed Sir Angus, had merely passed behind a clump of young oak trees, where the underwood was dense. There they joined a party of youths and girls hotly engaged in a game of hunt-the-ring, and it may freely be said that had Sir Angus Lockart been able to see through the oak foliage he would have been less inattentive to Miss Lushet.

Of course Edith had not omitted to invite Mr. Eagle, and it is certain that he, half perhaps from inclination, half from good nature, had lost no time in seeking out Miss Polly Grange. Loitering about the hill-side this

honest couple admired the view already described, gathered plants, and wiled away the sunny hours with much congenial talk.

Here and there parties of their friends, not altogether engrossed by their own affairs, remarked their wanderings ; and smiling eyes observed how from time to time Polly's innocent, open face brightened and beautified under Eagle's direct and kindly gaze.

Towards five o'clock, a tea-table, set up somehow on the turf slopes not far from the Beechworth Dovecot, became the point of general attraction.

Like bright parterres, the ladies clustered on the grass, and seated themselves in groups.

The feathered occupants of the cot, unused to so much company, swept round in wide circles high in the air, until cakes bountifully scattered by the fair hostess proved irresistible, and the timid flights fluttering to the ground hastily pecked tempting morsels almost from the lady's hands.

Mr. Grange's ringing, hearty tones had been heard in every part of the grounds in turn. Encouraged by Edith, he too scattered tea-bread, and laughed as gaily as any of the girls round him at the antics of the birds as they tumbled each other over in their eagerness, until, carriages being announced in rapid succession, the party began to break up.

Seizing, then, his opportunity, the Squire turned to Miss Lockart, and taking both her hands in his, told her in his most warm-hearted manner that he thought she had done well in accepting the fortunate young artilleryman,—to whom he believed and prophesied she would make the sweetest little wife he, the Squire, had ever seen.

Truth to say, Edith, having made no great secret of her happiness, had, in the course of the afternoon, been obliged to receive more congratulations than she was well able to hear without confusion of face, but assuredly, of all the encouraging words addressed to her, none were more gladly and gratefully accepted by her than Mr. Grange's, so fully did she appreciate his honest fervour and the ingenuous and genial spirit in which on every occasion he sympathized with the pleasures or trials of all his friends, young and old alike.

CHAPTER LVI.

AGAIN Sir Angus, his sister, and Marian Grange were together in the Beechworth parlour.

Archer Calvert had dined with them, and not till nightfall had he been able to summon sufficient self-denial to start on his walk to Ashcroft, whither the Squire and Polly, accompanied by Mr. Eagle, had returned immediately after the breaking up of the Craigiewood party.

Edith, not having seen fit to indulge Archer with more than a brief *tête-à-tête* after dinner, the conversation of the quartette had necessarily been general; but when at last the light-hearted officer withdrew, Lockart began to address himself directly to Marian, as if hopeful of somewhat improving his acquaintance with her before it should be time to separate for the night.

Left at liberty to indulge herself in thinking, his sister gradually became pensive, and then, as if to give expression to her feelings in language sufficiently inarticulate to be spoken aloud without betraying her thoughts, she took her place at the piano, and discoursed with her heart in soft music.

As on the evening of the thunder-storm, when playing to soothe her brother, her choice fell upon pieces imitative of the gentler natural sounds, and eloquent of rural

scenes ; and which, like the song of streams, or the murmur of bees in a lime-tree, made the air melodious, charming the ear without tasking the mind.

For a time scarcely conscious of them, Angus continued to maintain a conversation with Marian in a tone too low to interfere with their simple melody ; but at length, the sweet music stealing upon his senses, he ceased to speak, and leaned back upon his couch with his head in its cushion, tranquil, and content passively to listen.

The night was calm and clear,—the moon unclouded, and its light sufficient to make the landscape brighter than the parlour, lit as usual only by a single and well-shaded lamp.

Marian, the warm lamp-light full on her profile, sat near the round table in the centre of the room ; and, in a meditative attitude, leaned forward a little, her left elbow upon the table, and her left ear upon her hand.

Her eyes fixed upon Edith, she seemed unconscious that Lockart gazed much and earnestly at herself.

Unknown to her, a slight smile rested on her lips, and in her dark slaty eye was more than its wonted softness, as if, her heart full of love and sympathy, she were thinking thankfully of her dear friend's happy lot.

With evident admiration, Lockart continued deliberately to scan her face, and to watch the just discernible indications of thoughts and feelings which from time to time flitted across her mobile countenance.

His fingers played with a small book—Jean Ingelow's exquisite poems, which Marian had lent to Edith. Presently, apprehensive of having injured it, he looked down with the intention of laying it aside. His eye

fell upon one of its fly-leaves as he did so, and his hand paused in the act of closing it. The clean page had suggested something to his mind, and presently looking from it to Miss Grange, he said quietly,—

“Perhaps you will indulgently allow me to sketch your profile, while you are so still at any rate?”

“I shall be delighted to see what you can make of it,” answered Marian, without moving.

Lockart, supposing that the book was his own property, had no hesitation in using his pencil upon its fly-leaf; indeed, he had an evil habit of disfiguring his books when in the course of reading it occurred to him to jot down some passing thought, or to outline some quaint fancy.

He was a quick and accurate sketcher. No bungler, who made out his features with oft-corrected lines, or worked a profile into a likeness by laboriously shading in upon its outline.

In a few rapid touches, he caught the salient points of Marian’s face, and then with delicate accuracy filled in the details of the features, and rendered faithfully the expression of the moment.

Marian, altogether unmoved by his critical examination of her face, and, indeed, apparently unconscious of it, continued to look as heretofore at Edith, who, unaware of her brother’s proceedings, went on with her music and her dreams in blissful placidity.

“Thank you,” said Angus, as, having completed his task, he held out the sketch for Marian’s inspection.

She took the book from his hand, and smiled when she saw the portrait.

“I believe it is very like me,” she said simply.

Without waiting for permission, she then rose, and

slipping to Edith's side, laid the book open on the music-rest.

Edith recognised the face at once, and turned to her friend inquiringly as she lifted her light fingers from the key-board and closed them upon one of Marian's hands.

Another glance at the sketch, and she observed that it was executed in her brother's style. Her blue eyes sparkled, and, with a blush rising in her cheeks, she looked across the room.

Lockart, not heeding the girls, appeared buried in thought, and Edith gathering nothing from his expression, again interrogated Marian's face, which, however, she found little more communicative than her brother's.

"Has he—? Have you—? That is—" she began three times, as if unable to frame her question properly.

"Yes," said Marian softly, and presuming that she was correctly answering the question Edith had attempted to put.

"Ah, I'm so happy ! Dearest Mar !" exclaimed Edith fervently, but not loud enough for Angus to distinguish what she said.

She at the same time embraced her friend warmly.

"Does your brother rarely sketch people, that you think he has paid me some wonderful compliment ?" asked the latter, puzzled by Edith's excitement.

Edith, puzzled in her turn, and then feeling that she had made a mistake, looked very hot for a moment, and laughed a little awkwardly, half afraid as she was that Angus might have overheard or observed her.

"Well," she said, calming herself presently as well as she could, "this is so far good ; and such a nice likeness it is, dear !"

"He did it very cleverly," said Marian in a whisper. "Indeed it was finished before I thought he could have got it well begun."

"How did it happen, Mar? I was so much engaged that I didn't observe him doing it."

"Oh, he said that as I was sitting still at any rate—listening to your music, dear—I might as well let him sketch me. And look, Edith, the volume is mine; isn't that nice?"

Edith found this explanation of the origin of the sketch greatly too simple, and, perhaps to conceal her disappointment, she turned a little hurriedly to the piano again, and struck up a lively tune. This, however, her nervous fingers so bungled that Angus awoke from his brown study, and glanced at the instrument deprecatingly, whereupon Edith, with an effort, corrected herself, and played the remainder of the piece with infinite pains.

"Edith thinks it a good likeness, Sir Angus," said Marian, returning to her seat, but evincing no disposition to give back the book, of which, as if to account for her retention of it, she began slowly to turn the leaves.

"I prefer the 'Letter L,' she remarked, alluding to the contents of the volume.

"Ah, did I take the liberty of drawing upon Miss Ingelow's book? It's Edith's, I suppose. I read some of it the other day. I could show you some wonderful verses in it, I think."

There could be little doubt that he wished to have the book in his own hands, though he refrained from asking for it explicitly, but Marian had resolved to keep it, lest he, on discovering to whom it belonged,

should perversely suppose himself bound to rub out his sketch.

The music sufficiently excusing silence, she presently was reading one of the poems, and looked too much absorbed in it to be spoken to needlessly by her polite host.

Her innocent ruse was, however, almost unnecessary, Lockart quickly forgetting, in other and more absorbing thoughts, his own wish to secure the portrait.

His brow gradually became wrinkled, as it was apt to be when he thought saddening thoughts, and his eyes soon acquired an absent look, as if his mind had turned inwards, and he were dwelling earnestly upon a visionary scene.

His sister, remembering something about which she had wished to speak to him, left the piano in a little, and came to his side, but ere her lips could frame her question, she observed his absorbed air, and held her peace. Not when he looked so had she ever the heart to disturb him ; and gliding back to her stool, she resumed her music,—playing softly.

Intensest sorrow was betrayed by Lockart's eye, and his cheeks seemed to become thin and ashy, as his countenance took its stamp from his thoughts.

At length, and somewhat suddenly, he moved his head from the sofa cushion into which it had sunk back, and looked keenly at Marian. He caught her eye, and she, for the first time a little moved by his glance, turned away her face hurriedly. A faint smile played upon his lips as she did so, then his eyes closed tightly, and a probably unconscious shake of his head indicated in his mind some negative decision.

"I hear wheels on the avenue gravel," exclaimed Edith, ere her brother's eyes had opened again.

Looking up from her key-board, she listened with her head on one side.

"Who can be arriving at this time of night?" she said, with a slightly apprehensive air.

The window was in the back of the house, so nothing could be learned from it.

"Certainly there is a carriage, and with two horses, I should say," remarked Marian. "Can papa, after all, have sent for me, as he jokingly threatened?"

"I hope not, dear; for if so, something must have happened," said Edith anxiously.

"Some one must be ill," said Marian, anxious in her turn.

"Not—"

Edith was about to exclaim, "Not Archer!" but, ashamed of her selfishness, or bashful, she stopped short.

"Why anticipate evil?" asked her brother, rousing himself. "You alarm Miss Grange without cause. I daresay some of our friends may have left their cloaks behind them, and I certainly observed three strange umbrellas in the hall after dinner."

Edith, slightly relieved by this suggestion, smiled. The Crossmichles, she knew, were to start for London next morning, and both Alice and Joanna had, she said, left their bonnets; the thoughtless girls having gone off with the straw wide-awakes they had brought to wear in the wood.

Miss Grange also received Lockart's remark with favour, and was sufficiently encouraged to be free to remember her book with the portrait in it. Watching her opportunity, she slipped it into her side-pocket

complacently, though with rather a thievish feeling, in spite of the fact that the volume was her own.

"Voices!" exclaimed Edith, again excited. "What a plague, the hall is so far off that one can never hear what is going on in it when in this room. Don't you think I ought to see if anything's amiss, Angus?"

"No, dear. The left dresses are no doubt in the waiting-room. Besides, it is not well to go prying about the house at this hour."

"It cannot be about the dresses after all, Angus. You were jesting. I feel sure that something is wrong," resumed Edith with renewed anxiety.

"Pooh, don't be silly, dear," replied her brother, now fairly restored to his usual equanimity by the effort to combat Edith's seemingly gratuitous apprehensions.

"Steps—steps in the passage!" she cried faintly. "They are coming to the door. Several steps. Hush!"

Certainly more than one person was coming towards the room, and all three faces turned instinctively to the door. Curiosity was, of course, the prevailing feeling, but the only one of the party quite free from alarm or anxiety was Lockart. For a moment the steps paused outside the door, and he could not restrain a smile, almost a laugh, as he noticed the breathless attention with which both Edith and her friend awaited the movement of the handle.

In another moment it turned, and polite Vidocq's well-oiled head appeared, followed immediately by his perfectly-fitting dressed coat, and irreproachable waist-coat and trowsers.

"Miss Pentonville and Master Ebon," he said softly.

"Bless me, how's this?" cried Angus, rising from his couch in great alarm. "What's wrong? You seem well, my darling, eh?"

"Yes, papa, I am quite well. I hope you are well too, dear papa ?" said Ebon, running up to his father.

"I have brought him back to you safe and sound, Angus," said Miss Lucy Pentonville, removing her veil with one hand, while she pressed Lockart's hesitatingly extended fingers with the other. "We have had a very hurried journey. We left Oden only this morning."

"And why, if I may ask, so suddenly ? Not that you are unwelcome, or that I am not most happy to see my boy. I let him go unwillingly, you may remember, and was most desirous that you should come to him. Some fever has broken out at Oden ? I see it all, and am truly grateful to you, dear Lucy. Sit down. This is your correspondent, Edith ; she has grown so much that you may hardly recognise her."

Edith shook hands with Lucy Pentonville, and was kissed by her very kindly.

"And this," continued Angus, "is her friend Miss Grange, who is spending the evening with us. Edith is so amazed by your sudden appearance that I have, you see, to speak for her."

Lucy exchanged courtesies with Miss Grange, and Ebon, going up frankly to the latter, allowed her to kiss him.

"Now then, let 's have your news," said Lockart, limping back to his couch with one of Ebon's hands in his.

"Lo ! you can walk, dear papa !" exclaimed Ebon admiringly.

"Yes, my love, you see I can walk famously, in a sort of way. You are delighted. Thank you, my boy."

"Yes, papa, I am very happy, and mamma will be, oh, so happy too."

"Your mamma, my poor darling? what do you mean? True, true; I daresay she's watching us from above even now, and is well pleased to see us both so well and comparatively contented. Sit here, Ebon. You're looking quite rosy, I declare; what a pity the fever came and drove you from the fresh sea air! But was it a fever, or what?"

"We have to prepare you for a great surprise—we believe also a very great happiness," said Lucy, interposing, and placing a hand lightly on her brother-in-law's shoulder.

"Another surprise! Happiness! Well, go on," murmured Angus.

"We know," Lucy resumed, "from your last letter that you are now aware that your wife was wickedly libelled."

"Heavens!" cried Angus, "did you know that she was so?"

"I have been sure of it all along, Angus," said Lucy gently, "and not seldom I told you what I thought."

"Thought, pooh, how could you expect me to attend to what you thought?—I beg your pardon, Lucy; I mean—However, no matter what I mean, it has, indeed, turned out that you thought rightly about your unhappy sister. She was all that you believed her. I was the fool, the wretched infidel."

"Stay, Angus, dear. Let no more be said of that at present. You are satisfied that there was slander and treachery."

"I am indeed!"

"And you cherish your poor Dina's memory now? You think tenderly of his mother: our gentle boy's?"

"Tenderly—passionately, as still my most beloved,"

cried Angus, fervently kissing his lad's forehead, and pressing him to his side.

"Then, what, dear Angus, if I bring you forgiving greetings from her—gentle words, showing how all along, though fearing, she loved you?" asked Lucy.

"My boy," said Angus, looking down tenderly at the little fellow in his arms, "this must seem strange talk to you."

"Not at all, dear papa. Aunt Lucy has told me everything about my mamma, who is happy now; and so papa, I understand, you see, what she is saying," whispered Ebon.

Lockart looked at Lucy with a much bewildered air, while Edith and Marian, half doubting if they ought to remain in the room, drew back and gazed at him and Miss Pentonville in silence.

"I quite fail to guess the meaning of all this," said the supposed widower, in a deprecating tone.

"Dina fled from House of Dawn," began Lucy, gravely. "Have you heard of her since?"

"Lucy, are you mad, or is this scene a dream?"

"She fled from the house, did she not, Angus?" resumed Lucy firmly.

"Certainly; that is, she tried to do so," said Lockart, almost out of patience. "What then?"

"I have heard of her, and seen her since she left it, dear Angus."

"Dead or alive?" asked Lockart, stamping his foot passionately, as though he thought some hideous farce was being played out before him.

"She really escaped. She was not drowned, my poor brother."

"Not drowned!"

"She is now alive, and happy. Oh, how happy to hear at last that you have learned to know her, and that you no longer believe she wronged you!"

"—My boy, Ebon, my darling, what is she saying?"

"I know all about it, dear papa; so you may be quite glad. Poor mamma was frightened because you were very angry with her, and so she hid herself in Aunt Lucy's house to wait till you wished for her."

Lockart, crimson and white by turns, seemed beside himself with excitement.

"Didn't we bury her at Linbrook?" he demanded.

"I don't know whom you buried there, Angus, dear. It was not your wife. You may remember that the body had been, so I have heard, so much tossed about by the tides, that neither it nor its dress could be identified positively. Dina, at any rate, is now alive, well, perfectly well, and waiting only for a kind message to fly into your arms again."

"Heaven be thanked! God be praised! Where is she? I will start this moment. Let us go."

"Gently, Angus, are you quite prepared? Have you thought that she may be changed somewhat? Sit quiet for a little, dear, or I shan't tell you where Dina is."

Lockart, shaking like a leaf, was easily kept in his place; and Lucy, seating herself beside him, began to pour into his ear a fuller account of what had happened to her sister.

Vidocq all this time had remained in the room, but unobserved behind a screen which stood near the door. He had strained his ears very earnestly to hear what was said; but so rapidly were most of the sentences uttered by the excited speakers, that he, familiar as he

was with English, could but imperfectly gather their import. That Lady Lockart was the subject, and that the speakers were assuring each other of her innocence, was certain enough ; and he listened breathlessly in the expectation of hearing his own name introduced. He had left the door open, and his dilated eyes kept watch on the passage as if to see that his retreat was not cut off.

“Libelled—still beloved—buried at Linbrook—body much tossed about—Heaven be thanked !” such words fell on Vidocq’s ear, and he tried in vain, with increasing anxiety and nervousness, to make out the meaning. Then came the moment when Miss Pentonville held her brother to his couch, and began to speak into his ear. Vidocq could now distinguish nothing of what she said, and he dreaded more and more that Lucy must be speaking of him.

His attitude was that of a person prepared to fly, and his small figure shivered.

Thus he stood, when a figure approaching along the passage attracted his attention. It was that of a tall female, her face closely veiled.

Vidocq drew back his advanced foot, and gazed in astonishment, quite at a loss to imagine how a stranger should presume to walk in un-introduced.

About the middle of the passage the figure paused for a moment with an air of hesitation, and was plainly seen to be that of a slender lady in a travelling dress.

Suddenly it occurred to Vidocq that she must have arrived with Miss Pentonville, although he had not observed that any one had been left in the carriage besides Ebon’s maid, Robina, whom he had seen gathering up some parcels in it, and, under this impression, he was on the point of hastening from the room that he

might usher the stranger in in proper form, when she, having advanced a little farther, and close up to the passage lamp, lifted her veil, as if to see her way better.

Vidocq's eyes seemed almost to start from his head when he saw the visitor's face distinctly revealed by the lamp-light. He shuddered, shrivelled, so to speak, and, regardless of its occupants, backed farther into the parlour on shaking limbs that barely supported his weight.

At last the lady reached the threshold, and stopped there, gazing in upon Vidocq. Her right arm rose, and her hand was directed towards him.

He could bear no more in silence. In terror and horror he shrieked, and sprang behind Edith and her friend, bent only upon escaping the being, unearthly, beyond doubt, which seemed to menace him from the door.

Lockart, astonished yet more than he had been, sat staring at his valet. Edith and Marian, much frightened, and the former with cheeks bedewed still with the tears she had shed in her joy, retreated from Vidocq, while Lucy, guessing something of the truth, stood with Ebon's hand in hers, smiling at the scene.

Dina, for she it was who had alarmed Vidocq, hesitated for a second or two, and then passed the screen.

Another view of the case now occurred to the valet. He had for a moment supposed that he was before the ghost of Lady Lockart, now he perceived plainly that his original impression was correct, and that this was a living woman. In an instant the meaning of the whole conversation he had overheard dawned distinctly upon his mind, and with sudden resolution he leapt over a

chair which stood in his way, darted past Dina, and disappeared from the room.

Lockart and the others, looking after him, then for the first time saw Dina waiting near the screen.

"Angus!" she exclaimed piteously.

"My own!" replied her husband, springing to the spot as though he had never been lame.

I need not add that these two kissed each other; that they gazed with hungry rapture into each other's eyes, or that in the course of that night many a long hour was spent in the interchange of tender words, soul meeting soul, two spirits fluttering into one.

Lucy Pentonville discreetly led Ebon from the room;—in a little while she would send him back alone.

Edith also withdrew, her trembling arm round Marian's waist.

"Come with me, dear," she said.

Edith remembered to provide herself with a chamber-candle at the foot of the stair; but when she had got her friend fairly into her bedroom, and had closed the door, instead of using the candle to illuminate the room, she carefully hid it behind a looking-glass, and led Marian to a couch which stood in the shadow of the glass.

"This, I confess, is infinite happiness to me as well as to my brother," she murmured, clasping the girl to her breast; "but, my darling, what must it be to you?"

"To me?—Oh, Edith, how happy they were! How fearfully happy they must be!" exclaimed Marian with deep feeling.

Edith, thinking compassionately of her friend, was a little surprised at this disinterested remark; and, hold-

ing back her face to gaze at her, regretted that she had hidden the candle.

"How fearfully happy!" repeated Marian.

"And you?" said Edith, with tender questioning eyes.

"What of me?" answered Marian, as if for a moment scarcely able to remember that she herself had any personal interest in the picture on which her mind was dwelling with wonder and rapture.

"You," repeated Edith, still incredulous, "aren't you heart-broken?"

The meaning of this seemed to strike the little girl suddenly, and she laughed merrily.

"We may laugh," she said, as if laughter somehow, under the circumstances, required to be apologized for; "it is a comedy that ends well."

But though she had laughed, and though she thought Lockart's story a comedy because its end was happy, gentle, placid Marian presently burst into tears, and wept upon Edith's shoulder.

Edith had never seen her little friend in tears before, and she felt assured that her heart must, after all, be broken.

"My sweetest darling," she said soothingly, and not without a sort of remorse for the joy she had been indulging.

For a time Marian did not attend to her caressing words; but by-and-by she heard them, looked up, listened to the next spoken, and then broke again into merry laughter.

"What, my love, my kind, kind Edy," she cried, "do you indeed think of me—that I must be grieved? I was crying only because—indeed, I hardly know why; I could not help it. They are *so* happy, Edy; and oh,

it is so dreadful to think of it—to think of their ecstasy. One can hardly imagine them living through it. Does it not make you tremble in your very heart, as it were, to think of them?"

"Ah, yes, love, and for a while I was so overjoyed in seeing Angus made happy by Lucy's news, that I did not even remember your loss. You don't seem to have thought of yourself yet, my generous pet."

"I know perfectly what you mean, Edy. You wanted me to love your brother. Well, I won't deny that I was quite willing to do so; and that had I seen more of him ere poor Dina cast up, I might now be envying her. But no harm has been done. Your brother didn't seem to have made up his mind whether or not he cared for me; and I had sense and prudence enough, dear, to resolve to keep my feelings in check till he settled that. You hadn't an idea that I was such a proper girl? However, I was so in this instance; and now, here I am, scatheless. Enough of myself; let us think of Dina. How lovely she is! What an infinity of love and glory was in her eyes when Angus darted forward and clasped her in his arms! Such bliss as hers—his, it does indeed bewilder me to think of."

"Marian, I do believe I shall love you all my life more than any one—that is, you know, dear, almost as well as those I'm bound to love."

"I shan't let you forget to do so, Edy. By-the-bye, what a fright Vidocq was in! He must have taken Lady Lockart for a spirit. I did not see how it happened. Perhaps he was ushering her in, and she lifted her veil only when he was on the point of announcing her. Horrified, he dashed into the room to escape, I suppose, from the wraith of his deceased lady."

Edith, reminded of Vidocq, looked scared.

"I wonder what has become of him," she said timidly.
"You don't think he'll presume to show his face again,
do you, Mar?"

Marian surmised that the valet was likely to feel ashamed of himself; and I may as well state that Lockart has not hitherto seen his valet again. The rascal, who was nearly as bad as his master thought him, had been living in an anguish of apprehension of being found out. During Edith's party, his possessions were secretly removed to town, and on leaving the parlour, he ran right out of the house hatless, never to return.

Angus is too happy, to think of hunting him down; and Dina, loving and beloved, forgets how terribly he injured her.

THE END.







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